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The FIDDLING GIRL  
THE STORY OF VIRGINIA HAMMOND

DAISY RHODES CAMPBELL





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NEW YORK  
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**VIRGINIA HAMMOND, THE FIDDLING GIRL.**

**THE FIDDLING  
GIRL: THE STORY OF  
VIRGINIA HAMMOND**

BY  
DAISY RHODES CAMPBELL

ILLUSTRATED BY  
JOHN GOSS



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TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY BEST FRIEND  
By Mother



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# The Fiddling Girl

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## CHAPTER I

### VIRGINIA OF THE TUBS

“**J**INNY, Jinny, I’m doing it! I’m doing it! Come quick, quick!”

Virginia took her hands out of the water, straightened her aching back and flew to the back door.

There stood Bob literally on his head, for he was walking on his hands with his heels in the air. He went on a few feet, turned a somersault and came right side up, scarlet-faced, perspiring, yet triumphant.

“I’ve worked at that for weeks,” he

cried breathlessly, "and Sam Snyder bet I couldn't. I'll show him."

"It's wonderful," Virginia agreed, "if only your head doesn't burst. It looks now as if your face would never be white again."

"It ain't never white even when I'm on my feet," grinned the boy.

"'Ain't never,'" corrected the elder sister reprovingly; "oh, Bob, you know better than that!"

"It don't take so much time, and the boys think you're stuck up when you use good English. Not one of 'em does it, and I ain't goin' to be the only one — I'd be too lonesome."

Virginia turned back to the kitchen and her work. Even grammar paled before a first washing! Faithful Lucinda Dildine had failed to appear or to send a substitute for the first time since she had begun to

do their washing three years before. She was sick, and no one else would come so far for love or money. Virginia had waited until Thursday and attacked the operation with energy herself. But although she had received directions from her nearest neighbor, and thought she had followed them carefully, the clothes did not look at all as Lucinda's had done. They weren't white, and there were streaks of blue on some of them. The girl had done the worst looking ones over, and now they were swinging on the line in the back yard while she hoped most devoutly that no one would see them from the road, especially Mrs. Trout, who had eyes in the back of her head, and who criticized everybody and everything from the minister down to hens. Virginia could fairly hear her peculiar hoarse voice croaking: "Well, you'd jest ought to see

Virginia Hammond's wash! It's a disgrace that she can't do better, a great girl fourteen years old!"

But Virginia was so dead tired she didn't seem to care even for Mrs. Troutner as she put the kitchen in order. Her back felt as if it were broken straight across the spine, her arms as if they were pulled out of the sockets, her hands blistered.

At last the room was tidy, the floor scrubbed, and Virginia dragged herself into the living-room and threw herself on the big couch. Tears fell slowly from sheer weariness.

"If I were only big and strong and had arms and a back like Lucinda Dildine, and was capable like Mrs. Henderson. I know she could wash and iron when she was a baby!" thought Virginia enviously. Her thoughts went back — as when did they not? — to that never-to-be-forgotten day

when their mother left them. It seemed even now too overwhelming a loss to comprehend. Her dainty, lovely mother, so tender, earnest, and conscientious! Virginia could never forget her father's face the day after the funeral. They were alone, and he burst forth as if the words were wrung from him:

“I ought never to have married her! She was fitted for better things; she was a flower and needed care and shielding. Her people were right when they opposed the marriage! The doctor said the life here killed her; I heard him. And he was right. Everything has been against me, but I've tried to get along. And she never complained, and I had to see her fading away — oh, why, why had it to be?”

The talks between mother and daughter had been many those last weeks when Margaret Hammond's busy hands had to

be still and there was no more urging of the will to keep up and drag along somehow through the long days.

“Be a mother to the children, dear, if anything happens to me. Bob is full of life and headstrong, but he is affectionate and bright; and Janet is very sensitive. I am so anxious for them to use good English and they hear so little of it. I’ve taken pains with you, dear, and you will pass it on. But nothing is so important as goodness for all of you; and next best, education. It’s a heavy burden for your young shoulders” — and then she stopped abruptly, for Virginia could bear no more.

But now a wail sounded from the yard, and a second later a little girl of seven burst into the room.

“Bob won’t stop teasing me,” she sobbed. “He pulled my braids, and hid

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my ribbons, and he won't stop singing a hateful rhyme!

“ ‘ Jean, Jean, you are so mean,  
You're the dickensest girl I ever seen! ’

And he says — he says dickensest means somethin' awful, an' he won't tell me what! ”

Virginia settled Bob, and hunted up doll rags for Janet. She looked at the clock. It was time to get supper, and she must change her dress first; her mother had always been so careful to do that every afternoon no matter what happened. As Virginia pared the apples, then brought in the clothes, which made her heart sink as she viewed their by no means spotless appearance, and washed the potatoes, her thoughts ran on.

There was no use trying to go to school ever again. This coming fall her mother



had hoped to send her to the new High School in town, but for the year and a half since her mother's death the girl had found it impossible to keep up her study at home except by fits and starts. There was always so much to do. Never before had Virginia realized how much her frail mother had accomplished. Her father was no help in her books. He had had much less education than his wife, who had enjoyed every advantage a large city could offer. He was rusty and disliked to tackle it. He had met Margaret Leighton at the country home of one of her school-mates, and the gay, handsome fellow had won the girl's heart in spite of her people's bitter opposition. Neither her aunt, who had brought her up, nor her sister had ever seen her since her marriage. On the former's death abroad Margaret had received a few thousand dollars, which she

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welcomed as a means of paying off the mortgage on the small truck farm four miles from the village. She had mourned over the estrangement and death of her aunt, and had written imploring letters to her sister, but they were returned unopened. Her sister, she heard, was still living abroad and married.

A step on the side piazza, and Virginia's face lost its look of sombre thought. Her father must not be troubled.

As David Hammond came in he seemed to fill the little kitchen. A big, fine-looking man, singularly young for his years, Virginia thought he was the handsomest man she had ever seen.

"A hard day, little girl?" he asked in his hearty voice.

"I don't believe laundering is my forte," she answered with a laugh.

"Well, I hope you won't have to do it

again. And if you can't wash, you can cook. I took your cake and pies to Shannon's grocery, and they brought a dollar and a quarter. Here it is." He handed out the silver, adding: "You're the moneyed member of the family."

A quick, anxious look came into Virginia's face.

"Didn't you do well with your stuff?"

Her father shook his head.

"Not very; I have a rival south of town, and he was before me. Better luck next time."

Virginia hurried the evening meal. She was stiff and sore from her unaccustomed task, but she said nothing.

After supper Bob followed her from the dining-room to the kitchen.

"Jinny, let me and Janet do the dishes; you never let us do it all. Just try us."

Virginia turned gratefully: "That's

kind of you, Bob, for I'm tired; if only —”

“No, honest, I won't tease Janet once,” Bob interrupted eagerly.

And Virginia, with some few last instructions, left the dishes to their fate, and joined her father in the pleasant living-room.

Only peaceful sounds came from the rear, and Virginia took up Janet's apron to mend for school next day. Her father nodded over his paper. Then the kitchen door opened softly and Janet's face appeared radiant, smiling.

“Just come and see the dishes!” she cried. “And we've set the table, too!”

Virginia obeyed with alacrity. She praised the shining china and silver, and said nothing about their unusual arrangement on the table.

“Bob thought it so much handier to

have the salt and pepper shakers where he could reach them," Janet explained anxiously. "And we thought the gravy boat looked so pretty in the center, as we haven't any flowers."

"You're dear children," Virginia declared heartily, "and you've helped sister wonderfully. Now, for pay, I'm going to read you a new fairy tale from Father's 'Country Gentleman.'"

The two, amiable and alarmingly subdued, followed their sister into the front room, where they listened breathlessly to the story.

"Now, 'The White Cat,'" begged Bob, when she had finished; so Virginia patiently repeated for the twentieth time the favorite tale.

While the two were up-stairs undressing, Virginia encouraged confidences. Janet was eager to recount her school

experiences: how Mandy Fry had pinched her arm till she said "ouch," and how Teacher made her stand in a corner fifteen minutes for it; how she stood ninety in spelling, and how she hated reading.

Bob was not so talkative.

"I don't see why I have to go to bed so early. Ed Harter says he stays up as late as his folks do," he complained for the fiftieth time, and for as many times his sister replied: "Mother and sister know best. If all the boys in the country stayed up late, you and Janet must go to bed at half after seven."

Janet slept in a little white bed in Virginia's room and Bob in a similar one in a corner of his father's. Virginia followed the sturdy nine-year-old into his room to tuck him up after hearing his prayers. As she bent over him his arms came about her neck and he drew her close.

“Jinny,” he whispered, “I haven’t been a good boy to-day; I had to stay in at recess for poppin’ peas an’ makin’ everybody laugh, an’ I said a swear word.”

Virginia’s arms tightened about him in the darkness.

“What did you say, Bob?” she asked anxiously.

“‘Ornery cuss,’” replied the boy in a sepulchral voice. “You know you told me not to.”

“I don’t like it,” Virginia explained in a relieved tone, “but it isn’t swearing.”

The arms loosened their hold.

“My! I’m glad of that; I thought Mother wouldn’t like to know it. That’s all, I guess; you know about teasing Janet.”

Virginia went down-stairs in a softened mood. The children were a care and a

big responsibility, but they were such dears. They were worth it all, even — oh, yes — even the sacrifice of school and all it implied. If only her mother would understand that she couldn't help it and was doing her best!

She hurried out to the kitchen to dampen the clothes. Then she went back to her unfinished mending. Her father had gone to bed, and Virginia longed to follow. But, the apron finished, the girl first went over to a picture which hung between the windows and looked at it long and earnestly.

It was a full length portrait beautifully painted of her mother after she had left school. The refined, sweet face, with its marvellously direct eyes, the mass of brown hair in heavy braids wound around and around the shapely head, the fair neck above the high square opening of the



simple gown never grew old to the daughter.

“Mother, Mother, how can I ever go through it all without you?” she thought in a passion of longing. Then, taking her lamp, she went quietly to bed, and with the happy habit of youth and health, was soon lost to the world with its hopes, its worries, and its puzzles.

## CHAPTER II

### VIRGINIA'S DAY

“**N**OW, Jinny, you don't tell me you washed all them clothes with them purty hands of your'n!” exclaimed Lucinda Dildine the Monday following the momentous wash-day. “I never seen such triffin' girls to work as they is nowadays. They jest want to dawdle or gad. Elviry's girl is husky an' strappin', but washin' don't agree with her; an' Sambo Kincaid's black Dinah was savin' up fer a dance and was doin' up a white dress covered with lace fur it an' her ma doin' nine washin's a week an' six kids, an' a husband no more account than a new-born baby. De-

liver me from men, 'specially the husband variety, an' girls, black or white, who feel to know they're runnin' this earth an' don't care who goes under so they're on top — There! I get to goin' an' can't stop this side Jordan. What I said I'd do if I ever lived to git here was to send you off, Jinny Hammond, fur all day. It's a shame nobody has seen to it before. You're gittin' old before yer time with all work and no play. Now I'm goin' to be here all day, an' I kin git meals fer yer Pa and them kids, an' they take their lunch at noon besides. So you dress up an' streak it out that there door, an' don't you think of one thing but enjoyin' yerself till supper-time."

Virginia stood there with a dazed look. Then she cried: "Why, Lucinda Dildine, you're a dear, and I'll do it so quick it will make your head swim."



“UNDER ONE ARM WAS A BLACK BOX, AND ALL ABOUT  
HER WAS THE EARLY JUNE SUNSHINE.”



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She flew up-stairs to her little room and proceeded to dress. She put on a pretty pink lawn, which she had not laundered herself, tied her black bows on her braids afresh, slipped on the pretty slippers her father had given her on her fourteenth birthday, took her precious mother's dark blue silk umbrella, let herself out the front door, and walked bareheaded down the plank walk and into the road. Under one arm was a black box, and all about her was the early June sunshine. Birds sang and twittered joyously overhead, the air was fresh and not too hot, and Virginia's feet seemed winged and her heart lighter than it had been since her mother's going. As she dressed she had made her plans. She would go first of all two miles north to see Dennis Flaherty and his wife, and take a lesson. For Virginia's maternal grandmother had bequeathed her little grand-

daughter a rich gift, a legacy the value of which the girl did not yet fully appreciate. Virginia Leighton had been a violinist of more than local renown. Although not a professional, she had played in various cities for charities and benevolent causes. She had studied for years abroad, and her skill and a peculiar power of touching the heart by her playing had been of a rare order. Her daughter, while a musician at heart, had inherited none of her mother's outward expression, but it had appeared in the second Virginia. Margaret Hammond had dreamed dreams and seen visions of a future full of promise for her little daughter. She was planning when her health failed to earn money for lessons in the state metropolis for Virginia. Meanwhile she had, through her constant kindness to others, won the gratitude and devotion of an Irish couple who had some-

times done work for Mr. Hammond and herself. Dennis Flaherty had broken his leg when employed on the railroad, and since then had with his cheery wife eked out a living by doing all kinds of odd jobs. He had a born love of music, and with little training played his fiddle with a swing and harmony which gave delight to all who heard it, and when he asked Margaret Hammond if she would let him repay his debt to her by work, she replied promptly: "Not that kind of work, but if you will teach my little girl to play the violin, the obligation will be the other way round."

So for nearly three years off and on Virginia had taken lessons of the Irish fiddler. He knew mostly only dance music and Irish ballad airs, and a few American melodies, but he taught her to read notes and soon she was picking out tunes for herself much to his delight.



Virginia came soon to the Olentangy, a stream which flowed for miles through the state. Here the road became more picturesque, with the trees tall and stately growing by the water's edge and along the thoroughfare. The girl's thoughts turned gradually from music and Nature's generous panorama to more every-day matters. She had now four dollars from selling her cakes and pies in town and occasionally to a neighbor. She would buy Bob his coveted nickel watch, and Janet pink stockings to match her new hair-ribbons, and for herself some much needed ties for her hair — big bows of pink, and of light blue — for which she could not bear asking her father when she knew how hard pressed he was for money. And she was so tired of black, which though serviceable was not dainty and becoming. And now she was at the Flahertys', a tiny

three-roomed cottage in the wood but near the road. Her knock brought instant response, and a smiling, radiant face greeted her.

“ Well, darlint, an’ sure ’tis me wishes that drove ye here — for me mother in the ould country used to say that whin wishes was strong enough they was the little folk come back to do yer will. So for a week pasht I’ve been wishin’ till me heart was loike to burst, an’ here ye are.”

She drew the girl into the spotless front room, and made her sit in the only big rocker. Then she must find a fan, and get her a drink of milk from the new cow.

“ Yes, indade, Dinnis do be havin’ luck, an’ we saved enough to buy a nice Jersey, an’ we’re gittin’ to be millionaires wid the butter an’ milk we’re sellin’. Yes, me hand is betther, but it’s still in the sling.

It was a bitter day fer me, mavourneen, whin I couldn't help ye out wid the washin' that day."

Virginia rested and sipped her milk, content to listen, for well she knew that Norah had been pent up too long to be easily arrested in her flow of words. Then Dennis must be called from his hoeing and cleaned up, for Norah wouldn't hear to the lesson being postponed.

Virginia had the violin from the case — an ordinary instrument which her grandmother would have scorned — and in a moment more was throwing herself into her playing with her usual abandon. And then came the great surprise — two new pieces of music: "Air Varié" by Pierre Rode, and "The Golden Wedding" by Gabriel Marié.

"I sint for them to the city, an' the praste do be writin' fer me whin I wint to

town, fer I can't never learn to be shpakin' wid me pen on the page."

The tears sprang to Virginia's eyes, but she drove them back and forced herself to give vent to her pleasure in words.

"They are just what I want. How did you know it? You ought to be scolded, but I'm too glad to see you to be hard on you. You spoil me, so it's a good thing I can't come often," she cried. And then Dennis must play and Norah dance her Irish jigs until she sat down panting and laughing.

"There's no fool like an ould one, shure," she declared with conviction.

Nothing would do but for Virginia to stay to dinner. There was lettuce and fresh eggs for the salad, and Norah's excellent bread, and some sparerib from the pig butchered the week before, and "a cup of tay to cheer the droopin' spirits," and

last, a bowl of fresh strawberries from the bed, — “jist a shmall little bowl from a shmall bit of garden, an’ it’s a shame there’s no cake to play twin to it,” Norah declared regretfully.

“Just as if any cake could taste like this bread!” exclaimed Virginia, and the two smiled delightedly.

Then Dennis wanted some duets. As they ended he scanned the face before him.

“’Tis thinner ye are, acushla; the burden is heavy for young shoulders,” he said gravely.

But Virginia denied it with a smile.

“If I stay longer, you’ll make me an invalid out and out,” she declared, “so I’m off.”

And with a warm hug for Norah and thanks for Dennis, Virginia bade them good-by, watched until out of sight by the two humble hearts who loved her.

“I sha’n’t have any truer friends if I live to old age,” the girl thought with a warm glow about her heart.

Although Grace McPherson was in school, Virginia determined to go on to see Mrs. McPherson, who had been a warm friend of her mother’s. It was a mile further on, and when she reached the large pleasant white farmhouse, she was surprised to find that Grace was at home with a sprained ankle.

“But it’s nearly well,” she declared, “and oh, how delighted I am you’ve come! It’s been a century since I saw you!”

The two girls were soon in an animated discussion of different items of interest. Grace was a year older than Virginia, and a complete contrast to the latter’s dark eyes and hair, being a perfect blonde. She had much to tell Virginia of High School

life, and Virginia tried to enjoy it with no sinking of the heart for what might have been. Grace was as interested in her friend's experiences, and with a plate of fudge between them and with Mrs. McPherson in and out, the hours passed as if by magic.

Virginia fairly had to run away at last, they were so insistent for her to stay to supper, and she must be home to let Lucinda off to take the half after five inter-urban.

Mrs. McPherson followed her to the door and took her hands in hers with a peculiarly motherly air.

"You know, dear, that I would have been to see you but for Mr. McPherson's illness and Grace's ankle. You are a brave child, and I am sure your mother knows how well you are doing."

"Oh, Mrs. McPherson, I make so many

mistakes; and I'm so young. I wish I could jump over the years and be a real big help to Father," cried Virginia eagerly.

"Fourteen cannot have Solomon's wisdom! Don't allow yourself to be cast down. We think you're a wonder."

The words ran in the girl's ears as she passed down the road towards home, and she felt a fresh courage for the next day's duties. As she walked she hummed one of Dennis' Irish melodies.

She had reached her last mile when a figure loomed up in the distance — a tall, overgrown, boyish figure.

"Why, it's Alan Kingsbury!" thought Virginia. "I haven't seen him for two weeks!"

The boy hastened his steps.

"I went to your house, and Lucinda



told me where you had gone, so I came to meet you," said Alan as he joined her. "It nearly gave me the jimjams when I found you weren't at home. I thought you were glued there." He laughed teasingly.

"Well, I thought you had forgotten where I lived," Virginia retorted. "Have you been sick?"

"Sick!" repeated the boy scornfully. "Well, I should say not. But it's worse than that." His pleasant, good-natured, freckled face fell into gloom.

"Are things at home as bad as ever?" Virginia asked gently.

"Now, look here, Jinny, I'm not going to spoil your day by my grunting. Your mother" — his voice softened perceptibly — "was far too good to me. She seemed to look on me as her own boy and always toned me up."

“No one can take her place, but I’m just as willing. Mrs. McPherson and the Flahertys help me when I’m blue. Even if I can’t do anything, just the telling will ease your mind. Now Alan, don’t shut your jaw that way. Do mind me for once,” urged Virginia.

“Uncle has kept me out of school nearly all last week for nothing,” the boy burst forth. “He says this cramming books into you unfits you for active life, and a lot more. And Aunt Deb puts an apron on me and sets me at kitchen work” — Alan’s tone nearly upset the listener’s gravity, but she kept sober — “and I broke some of her confounded china — it was so little, and my hands aren’t exactly small,” he viewed them ruefully. “I wouldn’t care if she or Uncle were sick or really needed me, but they don’t; and they have money to hire help, and the

finals begin to-day, and, you know, the junior grade is the hardest."

Virginia frowned as she always did when thinking hard.

"I can't understand it," she said in a puzzled tone. "I thought most everybody believed that a boy ought to have a High School course nowadays."

"But I want to go through college," Alan declared, "and my standing is good; now this week's absence will put me back."

"Your record is more than good; the superintendent told Father that you had an unusual mind and showed lots of promise."

"Did he say that?" Alan's face brightened. Virginia felt the same desire to comfort the lonely motherless boy that Bob inspired. Alan might have resented it, but the little girl by his side felt a sud-

den protecting attitude and with it a longing to do something to brighten him up.

They were nearing the little frame house.

“Just think, Alan, for once I don't know what we're to have for supper!” she exclaimed with sudden remembrance; “but I hope that Lucinda has made waffles to eat with maple syrup. Anyhow, she has something good, I know; do come in and sample it.”

“I hoped you'd ask me,” the boy responded frankly. “I even said to Aunt Deb that I might not be back for supper. Your house always seems like home, Jinny.”

“Does it?” Virginia beamed delightedly upon him, but could say no more, for the children with an Indian war-whoop came upon them, and they all passed noisily into the house.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DAWN

**I**N the days that followed, Virginia thought much of Alan. His words to her on the night of his last visit stayed in her mind.

“Jinny, if it gets unbearable I may disappear some fine day and paddle my own canoe. I promised Father that I would not let anything interfere with getting an education, and I shouldn’t wonder from the way Uncle Enos talks but what he will make me stay out of school all next year.”

“Not your senior year!” Virginia exclaimed in amazement. “Oh, he couldn’t do that!”

“I have no doubt of it,” Alan replied decidedly, “so if I do go off, don’t think badly of me. I shall write to you.”

“Just wait,” begged Virginia earnestly. “The summer vacation will begin shortly, and who knows what may turn up?”

As she went about her work she tried to imagine what her mother would do for the boy to whom she was so warmly attached; but one plan after another flitted through her mind only to be dismissed as utterly impracticable.

Her father was working in his vegetable beds. Virginia ran out to him.

“Father, I’m so worried about Alan. His uncle and aunt don’t want him to go to school.” She told him some of the details.

“Margaret always said that the Blacks knew as much about children — boys especially — as an elephant,” Mr. Hammond

said impatiently. "They have lived such a narrow, shut-in life they are way behind the times. They don't half appreciate Alan's ability and promise. Here they want him to cut out school when there's no earthly reason for it, and I want you to go, yet everything seems against it."

"Couldn't you try to persuade them?" Virginia ignored her father's last remark, for it was a sore subject with him.

"I can try, but Enos Black is as pig-headed as Johnson's mule, and you know he had to shoot it because nothing on earth would make it go if it didn't want to. Well, I'll do my best. If he could only get away and study, — well, I'll think it over, but it's a tough proposition."

"School is out! school is out!" screamed the children at the top of their lungs as they came up the walk, swinging their lunch boxes high in the air.

“No more old school till fall,” sang Bob.  
“Oh, ain’t I glad, gladder, gladdest!”

“I’m going to play till I’m tired,” Janet declared; “I’m going to do everything. Bob and I are making up a lot of shows and dare games, Jinny.”

Virginia tried to show some enthusiasm, but her heart sank. For well she knew the capacity of the two for mischief and enterprise. School duties with the long recesses formed a species of discipline, not severe, but mildly efficient in toning down the exuberance of the healthy, active little savages. The long summer stretched out before Virginia full of all kinds of possibilities and lurking with perils by land and perils by water, perils in the air and perils on the housetops.

“Well, you can have an hour before supper,” she said, “and if you go out by the big tree you’ll find a surprise.”



Off they scampered, and the sound of their amazed and delighted voices reached Virginia as they came upon the new swing their father had put up for them an hour before.

The days that followed fulfilled Virginia's anticipations. Bob fell from the loft twice and bruised his back and cut his head. Janet in trying to do the acrobat act in a circus sprained her wrist. Then things quieted down for a day or two. Mrs. McPherson, who had been down lately, begged Virginia to believe with all her mind and heart that the children were to be obedient and docile; and Virginia tried to obey her. As she was dusting the down-stairs rooms after her usual weekly sweeping, she bent her mind to her task, saying over and over: "They will be good; they are good; they will always be obedient, kind and gentle," according to

New Thought methods. A half hour later she was startled by heart-rending shrieks from the direction of the orchard.

She dashed frantically out of the house towards the scene of disaster. A hundred wild probabilities ran rapidly through her mind. When she reached the orchard Bob was calmly sitting on an overturned box, and Janet, red-faced, with eyes swollen from crying, was lying on the grass. There were rows of sticks standing upright in the ground, while back of them were old ottomans and broken chairs from the attic.

“What have you done?” cried the elder sister, looking at Bob accusingly.

“It’s all Janet; she is the biggest baby. I hoped she was getting past it, but she never will,” Bob burst forth indignantly.

“Bob, what were you doing?” Virginia demanded sternly.

“Playing Bluebeard. It was all going on so dandy, and Janet really did well, when the last scene came. I hauled her by her hair, I dragged her about, I had a knife in one hand, another minute and I would have cut off her head, when she yelled loud enough for the Flahertys to hear! She just spoiled the whole thing!”

“It hurt awful,” protested Janet eagerly. “You just try it, Bob Hammond, only your hair’s too short; and I was afraid he’d forget it wasn’t really truly, and would cut me with that horrid knife. I’m not a baby. I never told Father how you pushed me into the pond.”

“Bob, you are too rough with a little girl. You must remember that real manly boys never frighten or tease those who are smaller and weaker.”

“I ain’t weaker, an’ I’m nearly as big,” Janet declared. “I do wish, Jinny, you

wouldn't interrupt us when we're havin' fun. Come on, Bob, let's finish and leave out the hair draggin' part."

Virginia picked up the knife.

"I've hunted an hour for this!" she exclaimed. "Bob, you know how I depend on it in the kitchen."

"But I didn't have a sword, and I lost my pen-knife, and I had to have a weep-pon," Bob explained conclusively.

"I'll lend you my brass paper cutter if you'll promise to be careful of it," promised Virginia. "But what are the upright sticks for?"

"Why, they're the folks that have to stand; there's such a crowd the seats are full. You can't have a play without an — an —"

"Audjuncce," prompted Bob.

As Virginia was getting dinner her father came into the kitchen.

“ I went over to see the Blacks,” he said, “ but they were gone to the station, Alan said, to meet Enos’ younger brother from the West. I had forgotten he had one; I don’t believe they have had much to do with each other.”

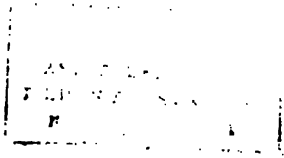
“ I’m so sorry,” Virginia exclaimed; “ it does seem as if everything is against poor Alan. He was in a minute yesterday and told me that by studying half the nights he had passed his junior examinations. And there’s Mart Ely won’t study at all, and his father offering him everything if he will only keep on at school! This world is sort of topsy turvy.”

“ Don’t let Mrs. McPherson hear you say that,” her father said laughing; “ she would tell you that New Thought makes one’s own world, and that you can carve out your own career.”

“ Well, New Thought must be right if



**“ VIRGINIA LOOKED AT HIM IN THE GREATEST SURPRISE.”**



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Mrs. McPherson uses it, but somehow it doesn't seem to work always. Perhaps it's my fault," sighed his daughter.

"What do you know about it?" asked Mr. Hammond in surprise.

"Not much," confessed Virginia, and told him of the morning's incident.

"Those children are a team!" was her father's only comment as he laughed heartily over the story.

Two days later as Virginia, her stocking bag in her lap, darned the family hosiery under the big elm in the side yard, a boy's form suddenly swung itself over the front fence and Alan Kingsbury bounded over the front lawn and threw himself down on the grass beside her.

Virginia looked at him in the greatest surprise.

"Why, Alan Kingsbury! What has happened to you?" she demanded.



“Does it look like smallpox, or do you think I’m gettin’ scarlet rash?” the boy counter-questioned with mock anxiety.

His eyes danced, his mouth seemed unable to keep sober.

“Oh, Alan, has anything good come to you?”

“Just hasn’t it, though! I can’t believe it yet. You know you told me it was always the darkest just before dawn, and it did seem as if things couldn’t be much darker. And then everything was changed as if by magic. The magician this time was Uncle Enos’ brother. He’s so different that I can’t believe yet that he is related to him at all, Jinny. He’s big and hearty and generous, a great handsome fellow. Why, the minute he came into the house it seemed like a different place. He couldn’t lift the shades, or change that

dreary old furniture in the parlor, but it seemed as if the sun had come in in spite of Aunt Deb. And at supper that first night he told us all stories of the West and made us laugh—even Uncle Enos laughed out loud!”

“But what did he do for you, Alan? Don’t be so long,” urged Virginia impatiently.

“I’m coming to it; he hadn’t been there long before he sized up everything, and, what do you think, Jinny? He’s going to take me West with him, and have me go to the State University at Madison, Wisconsin, and, you know, he’s no relation to me! He has a big ranch near there of a thousand acres, and summers I’m going to work on the ranch, and I’m to have horses to ride, and see life. I never will be sure of it till I get there. I don’t see how Uncle Enos ever consented, or Aunt

Deb; but I guess on the whole they're glad to get rid of me. And Uncle Enos is to pay for my schooling and clothes and I'm to work for my board."

"The rest of it seems wonderful enough, but about the money seems a miracle," Virginia declared. "Oh, Alan, how glad Mother would be!"

"I thought of that right away — of you and your mother. You two have been the only ones who really cared about me, Jinny; if only your father could move out there, wouldn't that be great?"

"He will never leave Ohio," said Virginia. "And I don't believe you'll ever come back, Alan. Has Mr. Black any family?"

"I should say he had! — a wife, three children, a girl your age and a son a junior in the University. He has gone East on business but will be back day after to-

morrow, and I'm to meet him at the village Saturday morning."

"The time is short enough," Virginia declared. "Stay to supper and we'll celebrate your good fortune with—let me see, I'll scallop some potatoes and have cauliflower, and celery and biscuit and coffee, and red raspberries. I baked a cake this morning—I must have felt it in my bones that you were to eat it."

"Let us have one of our old games of ball, and then I'll help you get supper," said Alan.

"An' is it help you call it, Mither Alan?" mocked the girl, as she threw her bag of stockings on the ground and sprang to her feet.

Alan drew the ball from his pocket.

"What an unearthly stillness! Where are the children?" he asked suddenly.

"They're spending the day at the Fla-

hertys, and oh, it's been such a rest. They're dear — ”

“ But absence makes them dearer,” added the boy laughing.

“ Well, for a day,” admitted Virginia.

After a vigorous game — for Virginia had, after much practice, learned to throw a ball “ as unlike a girl as possible,” Alan said — the two went into the house to prepare the supper. Alan had never seemed so boyishly free and gay. He ground the coffee, and helped pare the potatoes, and even wore one of Virginia's aprons.

“ I hardly dared propose it after your trials with Aunt Deb!” Virginia declared laughing.

He teased the young cook till she threatened to discharge him, and they screamed with laughter over the assistant cook helping himself on the sly to some rich cream

which turned out to be sour. It doesn't need wit to make happy young folks laugh.

And then Mr. Hammond and the children came in, and the story of Alan's unexpected turn of fortune had to be told afresh.

"Gee whilliker!" Bob exclaimed; "don't I wish I was goin', too?"

"Well, we've had a dandy time; I think the Flahertys are the best folks to visit," announced Janet, who thought that it was time to have a little attention herself.

"I knew you would have; I only hope you left a roof over their heads," Virginia interrupted.

"They said we were rale quality," Bob announced with a triumphant air.

"And Mrs. Flaherty said I was a little lady." This from Janet.

"And she gave us tea and pie and raisin bread and sugar tart," cried Bob.

“And Bob had the stomachache after dinner and had to drink peppermint tea.”

“Didn’t have to, it was good!” mumbled the boy with his mouth full of potato. For they were at supper now enjoying Virginia’s meal.

They all, including Mr. Hammond, helped with the dishes and made great fun over it. Then in the living-room Virginia played the jigs and lively airs Alan enjoyed. They had flinch and parchesi, and after the children were off to bed, a game of checkers and backgammon.

“Write to us sometimes, Alan, and don’t forget us,” Mr. Hammond said as the boy took leave.

“I’m afraid I’m not much of a letter writer, but I shall make a stagger at it,” promised Alan. “I shall run in before Saturday. Good night.”

The boy turned away from the light and

cheer, and as he went on towards the house he could never look upon as home, a shadow fell over his high spirits and hopes, and he wondered when he would see his old friends again in the years before him, and if in his new home, wonderful as it might prove, there would not be times when he would be homesick to see the girl friend of his depressing boyhood; the girl who, whatever her own trials, had ever a cheery word for him.



## CHAPTER IV

### AN UNWELCOME REVELATION

VIRGINIA decided that she would drive into town with her father in the truck wagon Saturday to see Alan off.

“It would seem as if he had real folks,” the girl said, as neither Uncle Enos nor Aunt Deb could spare the time! Saturday was a very busy day for the little housewife, but it was a poor friend who couldn’t manage to give a few hours for a farewell send-off to one who was as near as Alan, she thought. The time was so short that it was a matter of grave consideration and much thought as to what could be made for Alan’s good-by present. Then she remembered the five handsome white silk

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handkerchiefs which her father had always declared too good for a working man's use. He readily agreed to donate two to Virginia to embroider. The letters were rather wobbly, but every one knows that K is not an easy letter to follow, and if effort be a proof of excellence, certainly the handkerchiefs were worth their weight in gold. Fortunately Mrs. McPherson had invited the children to spend the day with her, so Virginia could leave home with an easy mind. Dan Minchin took Alan and his trunk in his wagon. And there at the little station was Mr. Andrews, the school superintendent, and three or four of the boys of Alan's class. The train came around the bend on schedule time. Virginia had prepared a neat little speech for the occasion, but, when the actual moment arrived, the lump in her throat became too big to swallow, and she slipped her little

package into the boy's pocket and could only falter: "Good-by, I shall miss you dreadfully, Alan."

Mr. Andrews wrung the lad's hand.

"We're sorry to lose you, but it's a fine thing for you. I'm sure you will make your mark in the future."

The boys called out "So long," "Good luck, old man," "I wish we were going, too." Mr. Hammond, whose horse was restive, waved his hand from the wagon. Then a tall fine-looking man stepped down from the platform, and Virginia was sure that this was Alan's new friend. The lad seized the girl by the hand and fairly dragged her forward.

"This is Jinny, Mr. Black."

And Virginia found herself looking into a pair of eyes as honest and open as Alan's own, while a hearty voice boomed forth as he gripped her hands: "This is my

boy's friend: I hope some day to know you better. I shall take good care of him, Miss Jinny."

They sprang on the train, there was a sudden mist before Virginia's eyes, then the bell clanged, the wheels groaned, and Alan was off for his new world.

Virginia missed her old playfellow at every turn. Since the day years ago when the new boy had protected her from some young toughs, and gone home with a black eye in consequence, the two had been like brother and sister. But fresh anxieties assailed the little house-mother. The children were growing lately beyond her control. They were not bad youngsters — far from it — but Bob needed the firm hand of authority and Janet rebelled at times against the prohibitions laid on her by so young a girl as sister Jinny. Once lately when forbidden to roll in a barrel down-

hill, she wouldn't promise to obey. Instead, she looked at Virginia more thoughtfully than impertinently, and said slowly: "I've been thinkin' it over, Jinny, an' I believe I'd rather have the fun and take the punishin'."

Mr. Hammond, when appealed to, either shirked the unwelcome task openly, or ran away from it. He had left far too much of the family disciplining to his delicate wife during her lifetime, and he shrank from it now in spite of the prick of conscience. Indeed, Virginia was often puzzled by the change in her father. Naturally a jolly, easy-going man, he now often appeared irritable and impatient. He had been away from home now and then for a few days at a time, engaging Lucinda Dildine to stay with the children during his absence.

One day when Virginia was practising

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the new music given by Dennis Flaherty, he amazed and hurt the girl by saying: "I think fiddling is a big waste of time; better be studying or sewing. I heard a man in town yesterday describe you as 'that fiddling girl of Hammond's.' I felt like knocking him down."

Virginia said nothing, but she put her violin away and took up a book. Her father with a muttered excuse that he must see Flaherty about some hoeing, flung out of the house with a bang of the front door. The children, awestruck and silent, stared at their sister.

Virginia put down her book.

"Come, shall I read you 'The Hollow Tree,' children?" she asked with elaborate cheerfulness.

After an hour of their beloved book, the two went up-stairs without a demur, and as Virginia left them in bed she heard

Janet's voice in a strained whisper: "Father scolded Jinny," and Bob's hoarse: "He gave me fits when he stumbled over my foot after supper."

July was warm, but August opened with a close heat that was almost unbearable. Virginia wondered what had come over her. She felt tired, and for the first time in her healthy young life her appetite failed her. Lucinda and the Flahertys were worried about her, and many were the appetizing dishes prepared by their willing hands.

Grace McPherson had been away on a visit, and with Alan gone Virginia felt lonely indeed.

One unusually hot day she saw coming up the walk a girl whom she did not know. As she came nearer she recognized Grace with a rush of pleasure. She ran to meet her.

“I didn’t know the fine new clothes,” she declared, as she kissed her again and again. “Oh, Grace! I am so glad to have you back! Come straight to the big tree, and tell me all about your good times.”

The girls talked as only girls can. Mr. Hammond was in town for all day, and lunch could be late if needs be.

“And Alan Kingsbury has gone West,” said Grace at last. “I should think he would welcome any change which took him away from those wooden-faced Blacks. They always look as if a smile would crack their faces. Alan stood high in our class — I believe he was the brightest boy in it; but some way I never thought that he was very interesting.”

“That’s because you never really knew him,” Virginia declared defensively. “He never was allowed to go with the young folks, and always kept down. Most boys



would have grown sullen and hateful under such grim creatures as his aunt and uncle, but Alan tried to throw it off.

“ I wonder how he likes his new home,” Virginia laughed and then sighed. “ I’ve had one letter from him, but it doesn’t tell half enough. Boys are so — so — ”

“ Unsatisfactory,” supplied her friend.

Virginia drew from her gingham apron pocket a letter. Opening it she read its contents aloud.

“ The handkerchiefs were swell, Jinny. I shall keep them for college. The journey West was grand. The ranch is the best ever, and the family the kind we wanted them. Mr. Black is all right! I ride a horse with a lot of ginger, and he tries to throw me and tears around; just the kind I love. And just think! Mr. Black has

given him to me for keeps. This is the kind of a country, all right.

“Your sincere friend,

“ALAN.

“P. S. Don't wait long to write. A fellow likes to hear from old friends if he is on a ranch. A.”

“Now, a girl would write pages,” said Grace laughing. “Yet, after all, he has told much in little.”

“He doesn't say anything about the children, or what kind of girl the one my age is, or doesn't give her name,” Virginia objected. “I mean to give him enough questions to answer when I write.”

“Which he won't bother to do,” the other declared. “I have brothers away from home, and I know how they hate to write.”

The children came flying across the field

hungry as bears. Grace, looking at her watch, could not believe that it was one o'clock. She helped with lunch, amused the children, and made herself so generally agreeable that when she left Virginia delivered her opinion as she often had before:

“Grace is the nicest girl I ever knew. She never riles you up inside, and she is always ready for anything!”

The day following Grace's visit Virginia sent Bob on an errand for her father to Mr. Troutor's. An hour later the boy came tearing up the walk as if pursued. His face was scarlet, and he looked as if ready to cry.

“You ran too fast in this blazing sun,” Virginia said reprovingly.

“It ain't the sun, it's that snub-nosed Mrs. Troutor. She said — oh, Jinny, she said some awful things! She was talkin' to that loud-voiced Adamson woman, an'

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she didn't know I was in the barn real close, waitin' for Mr. Trout, an' she said: 'Ain't you heered that Dave Hammond's goin' to marry Lizy Marshall that used to live about here years ago? She'll run that place like it oughter be run; an' them kids goin' wild as they is. I tell you, she'll make Hammond a hustlin' wife from what I hear, mighty different from that ailin' uppish first wife!' Those are her very words. I just said it over an' over all the way home so's I could tell you; an' if she hadn't been a woman I'd have hit her hard. I jus' stepped out an' I said: 'You sha'n't talk that way about my mother!' An' then Mr. Trout handed me the money for Father, an' I run off. They all called to me to come back, but I wouldn't. And oh, Jinny, I'll be good as gold if you won't let Father bring that woman here!"

The boy, who had been fighting back the

tears, threw himself on the ground and hid his face in the grass, his whole body shaking with sobs.

Virginia, who had listened to his account with growing consternation, fell down beside him and stroked the brown head soothingly.

“You mustn’t believe all the gossip Mrs. Trouter repeats,” she declared. “If Father were going to marry he would have told me. I don’t believe he even knows this woman. I never heard of her. Come in the house and let me bathe your head, dear, and don’t give another thought to such talk. Come.”

But all day Mrs. Trouter’s words, which had seemed to burn themselves into Bob’s brain, echoed and re-echoed in that of his elder sister. It couldn’t be true, of course it couldn’t! It wasn’t loyal to her father to even think it! Why, her mother hadn’t

been gone quite two years, and, anyhow, her father had loved her so he never could love any one else. Oh, she must try harder and do better! She had felt so strangely of late that she had neglected the house, she feared, and she hadn't been patient enough with the children. She would get up early to-morrow and make her father the chocolate cake he liked while it was cool and she wasn't so dizzy-headed as she was later in the day.

After the children had gone to bed that evening, and Virginia and her father were sitting peacefully by the living-room table, Mr. Hammond asked abruptly:

“What was the matter with Bob at dinner to-day?”

Virginia hesitated and flushed.

“He overheard some talk of Mrs. Trouter's, and he thought it was true and it upset him.”

“What did she say?”

“It was very silly; she said you were going to be married to some woman away from here, — a Miss Marshall, I believe.”

Virginia flushed scarlet. It seemed almost sacrilege to repeat it. But instead of the contemptuous denial she expected, to her utter amazement she heard her father saying:

“She spoke the truth. I should have told you before. I’m to marry Miss Marshall next week. I suppose it seems sudden to you, but when you know her as well as I do you will be grateful instead of rebellious.”

Her father’s voice sounded strangely formal and far away. Virginia tried to speak, but she knew that if she succeeded she would end with the tears Mr. Hammond so disliked. Instead, she walked swiftly to the door and stumbled up the

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stairs blinded by her tears, to her room. Once within, she threw herself face downward on the bed, and sobbed out in a strangled voice for fear of waking Janet: "Oh Mother, Mother! how can I ever bear it?"

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## CHAPTER V

'TIS THE UNEXPECTED THAT HAPPENS

WHEN Virginia awoke next morning she felt oppressed by a sense of coming disaster which puzzled while it gave her heart a strange sinking. Then it all came to her. It was true, and no bad dream as she had hoped. All their good times were soon to be over. A strange woman was to rule in the home; she had already supplanted her mother in her father's heart. Virginia dreaded meeting her father, but it must be done; even the children were quiet and subdued.

As she started to wash the dishes Vir-

ginia was startled by a hand laid on her arm:

“Don’t take it so hard, Jinny,” her father’s voice pleaded gently. “I know it is sudden and hard for you; but try and think of my side. I cannot see your life sacrificed; I am terribly lonely myself. Just wait before you judge.” And he was gone.

Virginia sent the children on an errand to the furthest field; she hurried through her work and went into the orchard. Throwing herself down under a big apple-tree she had it out with herself. All at once a voice sounded close at hand.

“Virginia, dear child, how I wish I might help you!”

The girl sprang up, and then at sight of Mrs. McPherson’s kind, sympathetic eyes, she allowed herself to be drawn to the shelter of her motherly arms.

“How did you know?”

“Your father told me, and asked me to come to you.”

“Isn't it a dreadful thing!”

“I don't know.”

“Not know?” Virginia stared at her friend in amazement.

“I can't tell whether it's a calamity or a blessing until I know the woman.”

“But think of my mother!”

“You know how I loved her, but I am quite sure she would not want you to have this bitterness in your heart towards some one you have never seen. Margaret was so fair and just. Don't you know that angry, resentful feelings not only poison your own mind so that it is diseased but have an effect on the person you dislike? Try, dear child, to suspend judgment. Think of your father, think of Miss Marshall! It is a very hard thing for her.”

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"Then why does she try it?" Virginia asked quickly.

"Because she yielded to your father's urgent demands. But where are the children?" asked Mrs. McPherson in an entirely different tone. "I've come to take you all home with me for a few days. Grace is to drive back for us — she has gone to see Lucinda Dildine. Let me help you pack."

"The children can go," Virginia said, "but I can't."

"Why not?"

"You forget Father. Who will care for him?"

"Your father has gone away, Jinny dear."

"Gone away?" the girl echoed. "Where?"

"He has gone to Carlisle to see Miss Marshall over Sunday; they are to be mar-

ried Monday morning and will be home Wednesday afternoon."

"I shall call the children; we can be ready soon. It was very kind of you," Virginia said quietly.

Mrs. McPherson's heart ached for the pale, sad-faced girl. She knew what she was suffering, and she understood the intense loyalty she felt towards her mother whom she loved so passionately.

"God grant," prayed Edith McPherson, "that the new mother may prove a worthy successor of my dear Margaret!"

While Virginia dressed the happy, excited children, her heart felt as if turned to ice. Never again would home be to her what it had been. Even the children would not belong to her as they did now.

The days passed much more happily than Virginia could have thought possible. It was delightful to be at the McPhersons';

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and so unspeakably restful to be absolutely free from care.

Mrs. McPherson gave her a tonic, and sent her long drives into the country; she and Grace and Mr. McPherson seemed bent only on making their short stay as charming as possible. The children were so happy that Virginia put off telling them the blighting news. When she did they were more angry than grieved. That night when Janet knelt at her sister's knee she prayed after "Now I lay me" the usual detailed requests and list of blessings upon relatives, friends, animals, poultry, dolls, and playthings. Virginia thought the Amen ended it, but Janet believed in postscripts.

"Please, God, send my mother down here and take that other woman instead; but please be mighty quick about it, or it'll be too late. Amen."

Virginia knew that she ought to reprove the little girl, but she felt unequal to the task, and perhaps unwilling.

Instead of going directly down-stairs she stepped into the bath-room. Before turning the faucet Bob's voice came to her ears:

"I say, Janet, if Father brings that woman back let's don't do a thing she tells us; we'll only mind Jinny. Let's lead her a dance. I've thought up a lot of things, and I've made up a rhyme about her. I ain't going to be a clown or a diver; I'm going to be a poet, 'cause it's the easiest. This didn't take me very long, and it's good:

" "Father's gone to get a wife,  
She'll sure lead him a horrid life:  
And kids that live with her alone  
Their hearts will be as heavy as stone.' "

And then Virginia was beside them in the dim light.

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“Children,” she said, “what would Mother think if she could hear you? Why, that all her life for us was given for nothing. She was so noble and good and wanted us to be; she hoped that her boy would be a gentleman and her girls ladies, — not make-believes but the real thing. Don’t let Miss Marshall find us savages, without any breeding; don’t let me be ashamed of my children.”

She ran off down-stairs, feeling that she could say no more.

Lucinda Dildine had come to the Hammonds’ home early Monday to do the washing. She stayed on to iron and clean the house in readiness for the new mother. Wednesday morning Virginia appeared suddenly in the side doorway.

“I thought you’d stay till afternoon,” Lucinda cried reproachfully.

But Virginia only smiled. A few min-



utes later she was in the kitchen enveloped in her big gingham apron mixing cake, and rolling out pie crust. Her pride was in arms. The new Mrs. Hammond should see that even if she were only a young girl, she knew how to have things ship-shape!

Lucinda looked at her in wonder.

“You’re mighty good to go to all this work for a stepmother!” she exclaimed.

Virginia said nothing.

The afternoon came. Mrs. McPherson drove down with the children and great masses of roses, clematis, and honeysuckle. She praised the appearance of the house. “As neat as a pin from top to toe!” she declared. She arranged the flowers and vines.

Lucinda watched her admiringly.

“If she ain’t good to the children, I’m goin’ to run off with ’em,” she announced vigorously.

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“She is going to be all right; I’m more afraid that the children will worry her. I pity her.”

“Well, I don’t; I pity Virginia. I don’t take to stepmothers,” Lucinda’s voice was gruff with feeling. She was to stay to get supper.

Mrs. McPherson went away. She looked back to wave to the three standing on the front piazza, — Virginia in her fresh white dress, Janet immaculate in her pink chambray, and Bob in his dark blue linen. In spite of her determined optimism she felt a wave of apprehension sweep over her.

“If she shouldn’t love Margaret’s children!”

A moment later a carriage drove rapidly up the road and into the big gate.

Virginia’s heart seemed to leap to her mouth. There was no more putting off

the evil hour; it was here and must be met.

She took the children by the hand and came forward as her father ran up the steps and kissed them.

He turned to the figure immediately behind him.

“This is —”

“A friend,” said a voice quickly.

Virginia looked up to the owner of the pleasant voice. She saw a comfortable, motherly woman with a round, plump face and eyes beaming with good will and cordiality, who did not kiss her but gave her hand a soft pressure. At sight of Janet, however, she put both arms about her impulsively: “You dear little girl!” she cried; “and this is Bob!”

They all went into the house.

What followed seemed a sort of daze in Virginia’s mind. She heard as if from a

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distance Mrs. Hammond's praise of the house and the flowers; she remembered going out to the supper table and wondering if Janet would spill her glass of milk and Bob tip back his chair. She saw a new person in her place pouring coffee for her father. She heard her father's voice, hearty and happy. She thought that she talked some, and tried her best to do justice to her mother's careful training.

Then she found herself in the pleasant living-room, and after a time Bob ran to her, his eyes shining, his face radiant.

"Oh Jinny, Jinny! see what she brought me!" And looking down she saw in a big box the tools Bob had longed for. And before she had half seen them Janet thrust into her lap a handsome pink sash.

"I hope you will like this," said a shy voice, as a box was placed in her lap made vacant by the children's withdrawing their

treasures. Opening it Virginia beheld a necklace different from any she had ever seen, of pink corals. How had this stranger known that she wanted a necklace? This woman puzzled her; she was so different from what she had pictured her. She wasn't a bit like her stately, refined mother, but she was so kind and motherly and comfortable. She had never had any children, how did she know what to do for them? But she did. Somehow she couldn't feel bitterly towards a plump, motherly, smiling creature like this!

Virginia tried to think it out but the words were all jumbled. She tried to remember whether it wasn't the children's bedtime, but it seemed entirely too difficult. She wondered if she had thanked the kind-faced woman for her present, but try as she would her voice couldn't be heard. And then her head seemed to be

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falling off her shoulders, and somebody caught it, and a voice shocked and compassionate cried out:

“The dear child is sick, David! Carry her up-stairs and go for the doctor; I will see to her.”

Then a blank, and Virginia floated away to strange worlds and odd, grotesque scenes, which seemed to go on and on endlessly and to blend with an anxious face with pleasant grey eyes until she despaired of unravelling the tangle.



## CHAPTER VI

MA

**V**IRGINIA opened her eyes and looked about her. She was in her own room and over by the open window sat a woman in a neat blue gingham and big white apron and cap. There was something strangely familiar about the nurse, and yet the sight of her was baffling until she raised her eyes from her sewing and smiled. Then Virginia remembered.

“How much trouble I’ve been!” she exclaimed regretfully. “Have you sat up all night?”

Mrs. Hammond smiled again. “I’ve

been up a great many nights, but I didn't find it a trouble. I was glad I was here, for I used to be a nurse in a children's hospital, and it would have been hard to get a nurse unless we sent away for a trained one, and that would have been quite expensive. So Lucinda Dildine consented to come and see to the work and help with the children, and I took charge of you."

"Have I been sick many days?"

"Over two weeks."

Virginia was amazed. She could hardly believe it.

"Have I been asleep all that time?"

"No, you've been out of your head. The doctor says the heat and too much care have worn on you, and you just broke down under it. Your father has been worried sick over you, but I felt all along that you'd come through all right; and now



the fever has broken and you will get well fast.”

“ To think of me doing such a thing now of all times! It’s too bad!”

Mrs. Hammond started to reply when Janet came tiptoeing into the room. When she saw Virginia awake she gave a joyful exclamation and came swiftly but quietly towards her. She took her hand: “ Oh, Jinny, Ma says you’re going to get well. I’m so glad.” Then she ran to the white-capped woman and threw herself into her lap.

“ Ma, if Jinny is better, can’t you come down and see the store Bob and I have made, the way you told us? We want you to buy something.”

Mrs. Hammond glanced quickly at Virginia.

“ Go, I can stay alone for an hour,” she assured her.

The two went out and the girl on the bed could hear their voices discussing the play. A sharp pang went through her. Already the children were fond of the new mother, and were forgetting the old and her. But the effort of talking and thinking proved too much for her. She was so tired that her eyes would not keep open, and she fell into a deep sleep. When she next awoke, the watcher brought her beef tea. To her surprise she could not feed herself. It tasted very good, but she was too tired to think about it and again fell asleep.

So the days passed, dozing, speaking a few sentences, taking broths and milk and medicine; and always night or day the tireless nurse was beside her. Then came longer intervals of wakefulness and more solid food. Her father and the children were in and out. She felt stronger, and

began to sit up. One day when she awoke she was alone. From the room beyond came voices.

“ I made up my mind before I came that there wasn't going to be any ' step ' about my feelings towards these children, and there hasn't been. I just love them already. They're as nice children as you could find anywhere. You see, Mrs. McPherson, I've always longed for children. I guess I was born a mother, for I always mothered my dolls and then the younger children about me, and it was the same at the hospital and at the Orphan Asylum. But this is different. These children belong to me. If only I can make them love me!”

“ It seems to me they would be very ungrateful not to with all you've done for them. The doctor says that Virginia would never have pulled through without

your nursing. I cannot tell you how grateful I feel. The dear girl is so near to me and I loved her mother so dearly. I couldn't have left home, and yet I should have been most unhappy if you hadn't been here."

"I'm thankful it didn't come sooner. You see, it's harder for Virginia than any one. She is old enough to remember everything about her mother; and from her picture and from what I've heard she must have been a wonderful woman and a lovely one. Now there isn't anything lovely about me; I'm just plain Eliza Marshall. I've had to earn my living and have had mighty few advantages; but I tell you" — the voice trembled — "I tell you, nobody next to their mother could love them better than I do. I loved them before I come — came — and I love them better now —"

Virginia coughed.

“There, she’s awake and can see you.”

Virginia was glad to see her old friend, but during her brief stay and all that day Mrs. Hammond’s words, sincere and from the heart, ran in her brain. A rush of shame came over her. She was holding out against such devotion as this; she was small enough to be jealous because the children were happy with her instead of wretched as she had feared. The battle once won, Virginia lost no time in showing her colors. She had at first resented her father and the children’s calling her Ma. She would have resented still more the Mother which seemed to belong exclusively to her own mother; Mamma somehow seemed unsuited to the practical, sensible woman. She was not sure but that Ma, old-fashioned, homely and common, was the best name after all.

She heard her coming up-stairs with her supper. She watched her place the daintily arranged tray on the little stand near her bed. As she beat up the pillows, Virginia put up her arms and drew the patient motherly face close to hers.

“How tired you must be, Ma; and how good you’ve been to me! I must hurry and get well and try and do something for you,” she said.

“You’ve done that, already, Jinny,” whispered Ma unsteadily. “You’re a dear child, and if you’ll just let me mother and pet you up, that’s all I want.”

A few days later when Virginia was sitting up in the big rocker while Ma was mending for the children, opposite, she said suddenly, and a little shyly: “Would you mind telling me something about yourself? I heard you saying to Mrs.

McPherson that you had always had to earn your living.”

Ma nodded. “ Yes, my sister and I were left orphans when we was — were — twelve and fifteen. Pa and Ma died within four weeks of each other with typhoid. A cousin took my sister Charlotte, and I helped a neighbor with her children for my board. Then I tried sewing, but I didn’t take much to it. An old friend of Pa’s in Carlisle suggested nursing, and I went in for that. It was hard work those four years — but I liked it. I just loved those sick children — only when they got well and left or died, it just broke me up; and at last I couldn’t stand it, and when they wanted me for matron of a State Orphan Asylum I took it. But politics ran that, and after three years I lost my place, though the children cried when I left. I went to my sister’s for a rest — for do you

think that little twelve-year-old had come up something wonderful. She had gone to sewing at houses, and then she decided to set up for herself, and now she has all she can do in Carlisle, — a big establishment with a dozen girls. She has paid off the money she borrowed, and has laid up quite a bit. She has a little apartment and keeps a maid. Folks think it foolish, but she's just like me; she hankered after a home, even if she's only in it evenings and Sundays, except for a few weeks in summer. Charlotte is like Ma, as pretty as a picture, and smart as they make 'em. She is awful generous. She's always helping some girl along. Well, while I rested I met your father. He came to see Joe Perkins, a friend of his and mine in Carlisle, and Joe brought him up to see me; and then I came here. You see, it isn't much of a story."



But Virginia had her own opinion of that. She lay there picturing the two sisters winning their way in a big city, struggling, working, good and self-respecting.

“I’m proud of you,” she declared.

Ma flushed.

“Oh, I didn’t do much; Charlotte is the smart one.”

There was a long pause.

“Ma, I’m real worried over the children.”

“Why?”

“They’re getting spoiled and unruly.”

“Oh, don’t you bother your little brains over Bob and Janet. They’re coming out all right. I know what you mean, but they’re right at heart. I’m trying to make them love me first, and then I’ll tackle their faults and try and help out. I’ve seen a lot of children — all kinds — but ours are not a bit mean or underhand. They’re

open and above board, and that's everything."

Virginia's troubled face brightened.

"I want them to be educated better than I've been," she said earnestly.

Ma laughed.

"How old are you, Jinny? It isn't too late for you to have some schooling yet. You're not quite a hundred."

Virginia smiled.

"And that's what I've been wanting to talk to you about, Jinny. Your father feels all broken up over your losing a year and working beyond your strength. We thought that perhaps you'd like to go away this fall to Carlisle. There's a fine school there. It's not like any finishing school I ever knew. It's thorough, and the teachers are the best ever. I know all about it. You see, your father wants you to drop all these cares and anxieties. You're too

old for your years. Then you've never seen anything much of the world beyond the village, and Carlisle is a big place and would give you a lot of advantages. What do you say?"

"Oh, it isn't what I say; Father can't afford it!" Virginia replied in an astonished voice.

For the first time Ma looked uncomfortable.

"It sha'n't cost your father a cent," she said. "You see, I have quite a bit in bank. I saved most of my wages, having everything found where I've worked, and a friend of Pa's invested it well. Now it would just give me the time of my life to send you two years to Miss Kemble's school. It's pretty costly, but you could board cheaper at my sister's — she lives only a little over three squares from the school."

Virginia sat speechless.

Ma hurried on. "You see, Jinny, I want to do as near as I know how just what your Mother would do for all of you; and David says she had just set her heart on this. It seems providential that I have money waiting to be spent. What do you think of our plan?"

Virginia sat up, her eyes very bright.

"I think you're the best woman I know. I never can thank you. It's too much."

There were flying feet on the stairs and a sudden whirlwind in the room.

"Ma, Bob says you won't do what you did yesterday, and I say you will," Janet declared breathlessly.

Ma rose slowly. "Yes, I just as lieve." She looked shamefacedly at Virginia.

"What do you want her to do?" asked the latter of Janet.

"Why, we have a big circus on hand,

and we can't do a thing without a live tiger, and Ma was one yesterday," explained Janet.

"That is too much; tell Bob he mustn't think of such a thing," began the elder sister decidedly.

But Ma was already at the door. She looked back to say: "It's such a little thing, and it makes them so happy. I sha'n't be long." And Janet called out as she hurried her down the stairs: "It don't hurt her a bit; and the curtain we've got for skin isn't very hot."

Virginia lay back in her chair. She didn't know whether to laugh or be out of patience. Then the news she had just heard took possession of her. It seemed incredible that she was to carry out her mother's long cherished plans for her at last! She never could repay Ma, but she could do her best at school. What would

Grace and Alan think of it? She closed her eyes the better to see her day dreams and began building the castles which this time had a better foundation than air.

## CHAPTER VII

### MA COMES TO THE RESCUE

**V**IRGINIA having started on the road to recovery, finished the course with marvellous rapidity. It filled her with delight to find herself once more well and strong, far more so than she had been for a year. Lucinda Dildine had departed, save for her usual Mondays, and Mrs. Hammond doffed the nurse's costume and duties and took charge of household affairs. Virginia watched her with ever increasing wonder. She had never seen any one who seemed to make so light of work and who did it so well. She was that rarest among women — a perfectly healthy, robust crea-

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ture. It took much to tire her, and when tired a brief nap or rest restored her to normal condition. She declared she loved to iron, and cooking was a treat after so many years without it. But she confessed to feeling rusty and rather like a green hand in the latter work, and she called on Virginia to help her with cakes, pies, and biscuits.

“Your father thinks yours are wonderful, Jinny, and I couldn’t believe that you had made the ones we had when I first came,” she declared with enthusiasm.

“But I never could learn to make good bread,” Virginia complained. (Secretly she had often wondered if her lack in this respect had driven her father to think of matrimony.)

“A girl can’t do everything; but if you want to learn I can show you. I seemed to take naturally to it. I often made it



for the orphans, bless their poor little hearts!" Ma sighed as if from the depths of her being, for the orphans had been very dear to her. But she would not allow Virginia to help half as much as the girl wanted to, and she drove her forth visiting every pleasant day.

"Jinny, you never could understand how I feel about a home," Ma explained. "I've always longed for one and children in it, and I can't believe I have them now with a good husband thrown in. It seems like play to me, so you mustn't think I'm having a hard time. Then, your time is short, and you must see your friends as much as possible."

So the girl obeyed her. Her heart felt as light as air; care seemed to slip from her shoulders as easily as ice on a bed of coals. She went to the Flahertys' and was feasted until she declared she would

have a relapse from the good things they insisted on her eating. She had longer visits with the McPhersons, and she and Grace indulged in long drives and talks and croquet and tennis with no haunting ghosts of duties undone or children with broken limbs hanging before her eyes. A captain was in command of the ship who was as capable as kind, as strong as she was tender, and Virginia, for the first time since before her mother's last illness, let herself go and felt as free as other girls. Her friends rejoiced with her over her new hopes and plans with the exception of Lucinda Dildine.

“I don't see no sense to all this studyin' an' porin' over books,” she declared. “Jinny Hammond is as smart already as a steel trap, and I don't see why she wants to be rushin' off to a big wicked, roarin' city jest as she hes a soft snap at home.”

Lucinda had been slow to acknowledge the fact that her theory as to stepmothers had received a blow. "They're smooth at first, but time shows their real nature," she thought. "Jinny's young an' unsuspectin', but she needs a guardeen at the gate to watch." But when weeks passed, and there was no change, even Lucinda's suspicious mind grudgingly admitted that there might be exceptions to her rule regarding the race of stepmothers. And now there was the pleasant stir of preparation in the house. Hepsy Jewell came from the village to help Ma make Virginia's modest outfit. They had sent to Miss Kemble for her prospectus and decided on Virginia's studies. Students in the family were required to dress plainly, and all students were limited to dark blue or black school dresses. Ma sent away for samples, and she and Virginia selected a blue serge

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for school use, and a white serge for extra occasions. Ma's usually cheerful face was drawn into anxious puckers as she studied over patterns. There were pretty articles of lingerie and warm underclothing, with a pink and grey French flannel dressing sacque.

"I thought you'd better get a street suit at McAllister's in Carlisle — Charlotte will go with you to select it — and you'd better get your best hat and two pairs of shoes there; they have the best of everything. Your last winter's turban and brown coat will do nicely for school, and I've sent for handkerchiefs and hair ribbons and gloves and an umbrella. Let me see — is there anything I've forgot, Jinny?"

Ma looked eagerly at Virginia.

"I should say there wasn't," Virginia responded. "I'm having too much. It

almost takes my breath away, but you will do it.”

“It’s such fun to have a girl to fit out after all these years! Oh, Jinny, you can’t imagine how I’m enjoying myself!”

Ma was sitting on the floor in her room cutting out an outing nightgown. The children had started into school, but Miss Kemble’s did not open until the first of October. Virginia was not a demonstrative girl, but she suddenly sank to her knees beside her stepmother and hugged her in spite of the big shears Ma flourished in her right hand.

“You’ve made me the happiest girl in the state, and I will try to deserve it all,” she cried.

The exasperated voice of Lucinda Dildine came up the stairs: “Jinny, jest come down here an’ see what that pesky Bob has done!”

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Virginia scrambled to her feet and ran down the stairs and into the kitchen. There stood Lucinda, her eyes blazing with wrath.

“I’ve been hunting for that screw” — she held one out — “fer a solid hour. It’s off my clothes-wringer, an’, of course, it wouldn’t go, an’ I was sure I hadn’t taken it out myself. So I’ve hunted and hunted, an’ jest now I put my hand in the bluin’ water sort of feelin’ about to get the clothes out an’ there it was in the tub.”

“It is a shame,” said Virginia sympathetically. “I must tell Father this time.”

Lucinda’s face looked as if a sponge had suddenly been wiped over it, blotting out all the anger.

“Now, you ain’t goin’ to do no sech thing, Jinny. What’s an hour in a whole day? An’, anyhow, Bob had some reason in it. He was mad ’cause I borried his

hammer an' nails an' furgot to tell him an' he hunted a long time when he was in a hurry. Bob ain't ornery, he's jest a boy, an' boys — well, boys is so full of the old Nick that if they don't hev a bushel of Christian things to do every hour in the day they'll do cussed ones."

Virginia wouldn't promise, but Hepsy Jewell coming in time for dinner, there was so much to be done that all remembrance of Bob's misdeed passed from her mind. Indeed, from this time on, Virginia thought Carlisle and dreamed Carlisle. For far beyond and above her school life there she loved it beforehand as the home of her mother. She was thankful that none of her mother's people lived there now. She tried not to think of that part of her mother's life, of the cruel treatment of her aunt and sister. She strove rather to let her thoughts linger on her mother's

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childhood and girlhood in the city, of her talented grandmother, of her grandfather's impassioned pleas in court, of his untimely death when his brilliancy as a lawyer promised fresh honors. She fell asleep at night picturing her mother in the old home on Washington Street; her attendance at Madame Le Duc's school; and later her being sent East. She thought of her as a girl in Washington presented at the White House, of her round of gaiety there after her quiet years of school. And for the dozenth time she wondered how she had been able to bear the dull monotony, the uncongenial routine, the work far too strenuous for her delicate frame, on the farm. If only she might have had a more prosperous, or at least a life more suited to her education and upbringing! And the bitterest sting of all was her family's silence and ignoring of



her existence just because she had married her handsome, kind, industrious father!

The preparations were over at last. The trunk was brought down from the attic and carefully packed with the pretty new outfit. The weather being still warm, Virginia wore her dark blue linen suit and straw hat to travel in; and one bright September day she set forth. Mr. Hammond took Virginia and her trunk in the wagon; while the McPhersons' big surrey bore Ma, the children, and Grace with Mrs McPherson driving. Virginia, wide-eyed and excited, felt that Peary's setting out for the North Pole could not have been any more thrilling. She had been up since five o'clock, for fear that by some unforeseen mischance they might overlook something or be too late for the train.

Arrived at the station, Virginia was

both amazed and touched to find a number of friends assembled. There was her former teacher, Miss Cryder, and Dorothy Hapgood, a schoolmate, and Dennis Flaherty and his wife, and far back by the window Lucinda Dildine.

Virginia beamed on every one, but she hurried over to the window before chatting with the rest.

“Why, Lucinda! how kind of you to come! Don’t sit here; come with us.” She took her by the hand, but Lucinda drew back.

“I don’t know any but the Flahertys an’ the McPhersons, an’ anyway I’d rather stay here, Jinny. I’m such a blamed fool I know I’ll cry my eyes out. But here —”

She caught the girl by the sleeve.

“Jinny, I knowed you liked my caraway cookies, an’ I brung a box of ’em fur you

to eat on the way. A person likes to stay their stummick with somethin' on a long journey." She held out a shoe-box tied with ribbons and full of cakes.

Virginia bent over and kissed her warmly.

"I sha'n't taste anything better than your cookies anywhere, Lucinda, and I sha'n't forget how many times you've helped us out," she said.

"There, go!" cried Miss Dildine; "I'm goin' to cry."

Virginia, box in hand, hurried back to the group by the door. Mrs. Flaherty was neat and shining clean. In spite of the warm day she wore her black silk close-fitting cap or hood with its full ruche around her rosy-cheeked old face, as smiling and kindly as ever. Dennis in his Sunday best, looked as uncomfortable as he felt. The children were so very clean

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and well-behaved that Virginia felt of their pulse in alarm, sure that they were not well.

The train was a few minutes late. As the whistle was heard far down the road there was a slight stir among the group. Mrs. Flaherty slipped a little package into the girl's hand.

"'Tis a lucky stone from Ireland, ma-vourneen," she whispered.

Miss Cryder brought a box of pencils, which she put into Virginia's bag. Ma pressed her close to her; Bob sidled up and pushed something into her already full hand.

Somehow Virginia followed her father on to the platform and into the train. How little she had dreamed when she had seen Alan off that a few weeks later she would be going through a similar experience! Mr. Hammond found her a seat in

the Pullman that Ma had insisted on her having.

“Good-by, dear,” he said huskily, “be as good a girl as you’ve always been.” He bent over and kissed her. The train moved. Virginia waved her handkerchief in answer to the long line of white signals without, and she was off. She looked about her. Her fellow-passengers were not especially interesting. There were three men immersed in their papers, one asleep, an elderly woman with closed eyes, and a young woman reading.

Then Virginia remembered Bob’s gift in her hand. It was small and tied in knots with pink string. After a long struggle with the knots, there came to view a pearl whistle, Bob’s latest trade at school and therefore the treasure of his heart.

Virginia, the lump in her throat grow-

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ing bigger, was haunted by Janet's eyes full of tears. She looked around desperately for diversion. Her eyes turned from the dull view from out the window to two packages on the seat beside her. She tore open the uppermost one. It was Susan Coolidge's "Clover" from Mrs. McPherson. The other one proved to be a box of Grace's nut fudge with a loving message. Virginia settled back and plunged into the charming story while she ate the sweetmeats with the zest of youth. Surely no unworthy girl ever had such dear friends as she!

The miles and hours passed, and Virginia looked up from her book to catch sight of the elderly woman pressing her temples as if in pain. Virginia was alert at once. She was accustomed to take things on herself, and it seemed imperative that she should try to relieve suffering.

But how could she do it? There was no fire here to heat water. And then she remembered that at the last moment Ma had put in her bag a Japanese charcoal heater and showed her how to use it. In a moment she had it out and heated. She hurried over to the woman.

“Perhaps this will help you if you put it at the back of your neck,” she said. The woman thanked her rather sourly. The scenes without grew more interesting, and Virginia looked until her eyes ached. Then the passengers stood up and prepared for departure. The train rolled into the big station full of noise and bustle. Virginia, her heart beating fast, gathered up her belongings, and started to follow the others out of the car. She was stopped by the headachy woman, who held out her stove towards her. She almost smiled, but nature was too much for her.

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“I thank you for it, an’ my head’s lots better,” she volunteered.

Virginia crammed the heater into her bag and went along the wide platform looking for Miss Marshall, who was to meet her.

What if she had not come?

Then a small, stylish woman came up to her.

“Isn’t this Virginia Hammond?” she asked. “I am Miss Marshall.”

A few moments later, her trunk attended to, Virginia found herself seated in a strange unfamiliar cab driven from behind, which Miss Marshall called a hansom, and they were off for the new home and the new life.



## CHAPTER VIII

### HER MOTHER'S CITY

**V**IRGINIA arrived in Carlisle Tuesday evening, and Miss Kemble's school did not open until the following Monday. This, Mrs. Hammond thought, would give Virginia time to select her wearing apparel and see some of the sights of the city. Everything was as different as possible from the girl's former experience. She had been to the state's capital only twice with her parents when she was little. She was a country girl pure and simple.

She only awoke to the roar of the city the next morning when the maid rapped

on her door as a signal for rising. Virginia was quite shocked to see that the little clock on the mantel showed the hour to be a quarter of eight. She sprang up and began dressing; but this did not prevent her looking about her room as she had been too tired the night before to do more than tumble into bed. It was quite small, as were all the rooms of the little apartment, and furnished simply and prettily in white enameled furniture, with yellow madras curtains at the one broad window.

Once dressed she stepped into a tiny hall, and from there into the living-room, also a simply furnished, pleasant apartment. A few good prints were on the wall and a few books on three broad shelves. As Virginia was looking at some of the latter, Miss Marshall joined her and they had breakfast at once. The dining-room

in this doll house was as diminutive as the rest of the home. The tiny round table with its pretty china and silver, the dainty breakfast of rolls, coffee and fruit with cocoa for Virginia, to the little maid who moved so quietly and seemed so capable, all made Virginia feel that she was "playing house" as she had in her childhood.

Miss Marshall was as different as possible from Ma. Small, slender, alert, nervous, she seemed to live in a hurry and to count every moment. She was pleasant and kind, but Virginia felt very thankful the more she saw of her that Ma had been the one to fall to their share, as doubtless was Miss Marshall herself.

"I'm a very busy woman," said the latter, as she rose from the table, "and you will be much alone, Virginia, the next few days. After that school will take up your time, and I am generally here evenings.

My sister writes me that you want to do some shopping. Bertha — she indicated the little maid — “will bring you to my rooms at three, and we shall go to McAlister’s. Bertha will help you unpack and get your lunch. Do you think you can manage till afternoon?”

“Oh, yes,” said Virginia, eager to be as little trouble as possible; “I have a book to finish, and I’ve brought my violin and I shall practise some. I’m used to caring for myself.”

The morning passed quickly enough. “Clover” proved as delightful as she promised, and Virginia took out her neglected violin with a tender, loving touch, as if apologizing to an old friend. For with all the new things showered upon her, there was one keen disappointment. Mr. Hammond treated her “fiddling” as a thing to be ashamed of rather than a

study to be pursued. She had hinted at lessons in the city, but her father had said decidedly that it was not to be thought of, that Ma had already undertaken too much for her by no means swollen bank account. Of course this sealed Virginia's lips. Even Ma looked upon her fiddling as the merest pastime, and Virginia could see felt a growing wonder that she should choose that rather than the more ladylike and conventional piano. They could not understand the girl's love for it, her inborn talent, her need of its accompaniment to her life's duties.

"Oh, well," thought Virginia, as she played away, "one can't have everything in this world, and I have so much. I must just do my best at school and like Micawber hope that something may turn up to help me with my violin! I shall never desert you, my dear, never!" She rested

her cheek caressingly against the hard wood, but it did not seem wood to Virginia. It was merely the shell which held the wonderful voice, and some day she meant to make the voice heard and bring to others the joy it brought to her.

When Virginia came out to lunch, it seemed a pity to enjoy it alone. At home if Lucinda felt she was clean enough she sat down to meals with the family. So she said cordially to Bertha:

“Sit with me, Bertha; I’m not used to being alone.”

But instead of complying the little German girl said, with big frightened eyes:

“Thank you, Miss; but I must eat in mine kitchen. That is Miss Marshall’s commands.”

So Virginia enjoyed her toast and soup and grapes alone.

As Bertha was clearing the table she

asked her if she would be too busy to start earlier and take her to the big Free Library on Scioto Street.

Bertha nodded delightedly.

“No, I am almost through my work. I shall be ready by two.”

It seemed to Virginia that she could not wait to see some of the places talked of by her mother. She used to draw books from the library, and Virginia felt that in going there she might seem nearer to her.

Bertha, who had not been long enough in this country yet to be spoiled, was dressed as simply as possible. They took the street car to the handsome building. Virginia fairly trembled with eagerness as they went through the large corridors, with here and there statues and busts of noted men. She wandered about the silent big room full of books, with men, women and children reading. She asked in a low

voice of the librarian where children's and young people's books were, and feasted on the titles. She had read all of Miss Alcott's and most of Susan Coolidge's, but she had never had a chance to read Annie Fellows Johnston's or Sophie Swett's. She had been brought up on "David Copperfield," and had read many of Dickens' and a few of Scott's that were in her mother's library, but for two years she had had little time for books. She promised herself future treats, and with a wistful glance at Cooper's volumes and "Tales from Shakespeare," she hurried away fearful of being late for her appointment.

She was surprised and rather awed by the size and appearance of Miss Marshall's handsome suite of rooms in the Van Deman Block. She hoped that Bertha did not observe her little gasp of fright as the elevator carried her skyward, nor her look



of relief when they stepped on "dry land" once more. They found Miss Marshall in the long workroom directing a number of girls and women. She showed the same ability that Virginia had admired in Ma, but of a different nature. There was no confusion nor haste; everything moved on with system and dispatch.

"You will see that Mrs. Van Anden's velvet gown is sent promptly at five," she said to the forewoman as she passed out.

Bertha left them outside, and a few steps brought them to McAllister's. Virginia wondered if she would ever learn to take these great stores and the confusion and noise and the swift going street cars and automobiles as calmly as did Bertha and Miss Marshall. They looked at various suits until Miss Marshall's keen eyes spied one in a glass case.

"That is more like it; I wish to see

this," she said in her quick business-like tones. The girl's manner changed.

She was at once smiling and gracious.

"I did not know the young lady wished for so expensive a suit. You see that although it is plain, the material is very handsome."

She displayed a suit of dark, rich olive cloth with a touch of light blue silk. The cut of the coat took Virginia's fancy at once, but the price seemed very high. However, it was tried on and purchased. "A perfect fit," declared Miss Marshall in a satisfied voice.

From here they proceeded to the hat department. They found a broad brimmed olive felt trimmed with soft light blue silk and olive wings.

"Simple yet stylish, and very becoming," Miss Marshall decided.

"How fortunate it is, Virginia, that you

are so fair with your dark eyes and hair that you can wear any color!" exclaimed the latter as they went on to the shoe department.

Virginia said nothing. It had never occurred to her before.

Heavy-soled, common-sense shoes for every day and dainty patent leathers for best, olive gloves, and Virginia, feeling like a princess in disguise, followed her chaperon out of the store.

"We have time to go to the Art Gallery and Arts and Crafts shop," said the latter consulting her watch.

Virginia's eyes shone with pleasure. The Art Gallery her mother knew. She wandered about from picture to picture in the beautiful rooms wondering which were the favorites. She finally chose a picture of a young man in armor beside a horse, which was tagged "Sir Galahad," by Ab-



**“SUDDENLY VIRGINIA GAVE AN EXCLAMATION AS SHE  
PAUSED BEFORE A PICTURE.”**



bey; and near it was a copy of the "Sistine Madonna."

Suddenly Virginia gave an exclamation as she paused before a picture. It was a young girl's head, — a lovely face, innocent, young, with clear, wonderful eyes as if asking the meaning of life.

Miss Marshall was directly behind her.

"I thought you would admire that," she said decidedly.

Virginia was very pale. "It is my mother," she explained.

They looked at the tag. "A Girl's Portrait, by Stephen Keller," it read.

"He was an artist of wonderful promise, a native of Carlisle, who studied abroad. He died just as he was gaining a name," Miss Marshall informed her.

As they walked away Virginia looked back. The eyes of the girl seemed to fol-

low her. She felt as if she were leaving her alone, deserting her. Oh, if she might own the picture! She remembered her mother's mentioning an artist's painting her when quite a young girl, but she seemed to attach little importance to it and Virginia had forgotten it.

A hasty visit to the Arts and Crafts, and Virginia was back in the little flat wondering if the day had been one of her dreams or reality.

She determined to go about herself in the days that followed. She took long car rides about the city and to the beautiful suburbs. Always she found courteous treatment and some one to direct her, and she generally ended the day by going to the Art Gallery to see her Mother.

Sunday Miss Marshall did not usually rise till the noon dinner; so Virginia set out to find her mother's church, St. Mar-

garet's. She had had little of church-going in her life. The village chapel was often closed, and when open three or four different denominations took turns in using it. Her father had only his wagon, and if the weather was bad they could not go, and her mother's health had always been far from robust. But Margaret Hammond had talked to Virginia of the old church where she had so loved to go, of the fine choir, and of the fatherly old rector who was such a friend of the family. Virginia carried her mother's prayer book, a little much-worn volume which the daughter had read many times.

But she was quite unprepared for the service. The organ prelude, the long procession of vested men and women coming from the vestry into the church singing "Ancient of Days" and winding into the chancel seats, the grand *Te Deum*, the



chants, the solos, all stirred Virginia's music-loving soul to the depths.

A pure, high, perfectly trained soprano sang the offertory. Every word came distinctly, reverently. Virginia hardly breathed until it was finished. It seemed a real prayer. The vast congregation joined in the beautiful hymns. It was a distinct disappointment to find a young man in the pulpit instead of the old rector of her mother's remembrance. But the simple, short sermon on the "Joy of Service" gave Virginia much to carry away with her.

"Even a girl can serve," she thought; "I didn't think that little things counted so much! What a big thing it is to be true!"

Coming out with the large throng, one or two smiled upon the earnest-faced stranger, and a young girl near her own

age took her by the hand and welcomed her. The rector stood in his black robe in the vestibule greeting his flock as they passed. He stopped Virginia with a pleasant word and asked her address. "My wife and I will call on you," he said. Altogether the girl went home to dinner with a warm glow about the heart, a feeling that if she were far away from her loved ones, there was a home for her at St. Margaret's.

One thing remained to be done. She had not been able yet to find her mother's old home!



## CHAPTER IX

### THE NEW SCHOOL

**V**IRGINIA set out for school Monday morning with a brave front but a quaking heart. Living in a community where she knew every one, she felt in this great city terribly alone. There is no loneliness like that in a crowd. Throngs of people passed her, utter strangers, and quite indifferent to her. And now she was going to a school where she knew no one.

The house was a large double dark red brick. It looked like a private residence. Only the silver plate on the door proclaimed that it was "Miss Kemble's

School." She had hardly touched the electric button when the door opened and a trim maid directed her to the room where she was to remove her wraps. Several girls were here and all looked curiously at her although they tried to veil their glances. A late comer entered and many were the greetings: "Oh, Elizabeth, I'm so glad you're back!"

"Did you have a pleasant summer?"

"You were in England with your cousin, weren't you?"

"Elizabeth Jordan! I told Mamma that I wouldn't come to school if you stayed abroad!"

The girl, easy, gracious, smiling, answered their questions, and in turning caught sight of Virginia.

It was the girl who had greeted her so cordially at St. Margaret's. She came towards her at once.

“ I am Elizabeth Jordan; may I know your name? ” she asked.

Virginia responded and then was introduced to the others.

All were gowned according to the rules, and all passed into three pleasant rooms connected by folding doors, now wide open, There were desks and tables, but the floors were carpeted and there were a number of attractive prints on the walls. From a side door several teachers came in: Miss Kemble; Mademoiselle and Madame Frédin, the French instructors; Fraulein Müller, the German teacher, and Miss Herschel, the English teacher.

Gradually the work of forming the classes and taking down names was accomplished. At noon a number of the girls went home to lunch, Virginia among them, while many stayed at the school for the meal. There were only a dozen board-

ers, as Miss Kemble was averse to large numbers. She wanted them to be like a family; but the day scholars numbered over a hundred.

As the days passed Virginia made the mortifying discovery that she was not the bright, unusual pupil she had been at the little country school, where she easily stood at the head, but that there were many others here equally good, with a few far better. In some things — French, for instance — she was only a beginner. Elizabeth Jordan was in her classes, much to her delight, for she had liked her from the first. There was another also, Viviette Gordon, very beautiful and showy, who fascinated the little country girl. She had a way of talking which seemed to Virginia the very essence of good breeding and charm. She longed to know her better, but hardly thought it possible that

she whose ease and experience seemed so great would notice her. One day — an eventful day for Virginia — Viviette turned suddenly to her:

“And what do you think of the theater? Are you fond of it, Virginia?”

“I’ve never been to a play in my life,” Virginia said frankly.

“Why, where have you lived?” asked a girl, rudely staring at her.

“In the country.” The signal given for the end of recess, the girls trooped into the schoolrooms, but Virginia opened her history with an unpleasant feeling as of a thing apart, which she never had before. She had expected to find at a girls’ school of Miss Kemble’s type only good manners and perfect breeding, but while the majority were of a better stamp, human nature asserted itself among the elect, often human nature of a disagreeable kind.

Viviette condescended to walk to the corner with Virginia, where their ways parted, for several days. With her nonchalant, assured manner and her unusual beauty, Virginia worshipped her from afar. Elizabeth Jordan she loved, but Viviette she adored.

To-day Viviette drew Virginia's arm within hers, and with several of the girls sauntered along the street after school, which closed at two.

"I haven't decided where I shall spend the holidays," drawled Viviette. "I want to go to New York to see Bernhardt and Melba and Caruso. If I were only older I could attend balls with my cousins. But Mamma is determined that I shall be kept at this old-style, queer school because Miss Kemble is somehow the fashion. I can't wear my fine gowns, but I make up for it by my coats and hats." She looked com-



placently at her dark blue velvet coat, and threw back her head with the long blue ostrich feathers on her beaver hat.

“Oh, I wouldn’t grow up any faster for worlds,” declared Elizabeth with her joyous laugh. “I think we have the best times now, and it’s fun to enjoy every age as it comes along. I love every day.”

“I do, too,” Virginia agreed. “Of course sometimes I’m homesick, but it doesn’t last and there is so much here to enjoy and see. And Miss Kemble’s means so much to me!”

“Fancy!” laughed Viviette; “but I suppose at your home you never saw or heard anything. I don’t see how you endured it.”

“Oh, but I did see a great deal. The loveliest drives and woods in the state,

and dear people, and my home, — oh, my life wasn't empty!" declared Virginia, at once on the defensive.

"I shouldn't think you would see much here," persisted Viviette. "Miss Marshall has no machine nor carriage, and you go out so little. I must have excitement and spend money and have lovely clothes, or I'm not happy."

Six weeks passed rapidly. Virginia was feeling more at home, and had made friends with several of the girls. Two or three of the older pupils had taken pains to seek her out and talk to her. More than all, Virginia liked Miss Kemble. She was a fine-looking woman with steadfast, grey eyes and a resolute, kind manner. She was so courteous and well informed that at first Virginia felt afraid of her; but as she knew her better the feeling passed. She had the English History class, and

made it unusually interesting. Miss Herschel was an excellent teacher in physiology, language and mathematics, but her personality was not so pleasing. Virginia loved Mademoiselle Frédin, a young French girl, whose vivacity and pretty manners were very attractive.

Virginia had never studied so hard before. Miss Kemble's standard was high, and she taught other things besides books. Once or twice a week she gave a brief, pointed talk on some subject, current events, or "What is Good Breeding?" or "How Girls Live in England, in Russia, and Different Countries," etc. Wednesdays were the off days. Only one or two of the regular studies were required, and always something unexpected was requested of the pupils. Once the girls were asked to write offhand what they understood by service. Virginia had never for-

gotten bits of the rector's sermon that first Sunday. She wrote:

"I never thought much about service until Dr. Oliver told us not to whip ourselves up to perform cold, disagreeable duties, but to turn service into joy. He said so much depended on us. And it seemed to me true. He said that no service was too small, and that if we could only remember the little things the big ones would be likely to take care of themselves. I wished that I had thought of that when I had the care of the house and the children. I'm sure I should have done better."

Elizabeth, who was fond of poetry, had committed a little poem of John K. Bangs in a current magazine. She wrote that out.

"To serve another's will —  
That's not for me,  
My heart is not athrill  
For slavery.

“To serve another’s need  
Right heartily,  
In thought and word and deed,  
That’s Liberty.”

Viviette wrote:

“Service is the lowest form of work. Uneducated, low-born people work in the fields, the factories and in the homes. When a girl goes out to service she loses caste, if she ever had any, and sinks to the lowest level. We may pity such people, but we cannot associate with them.”

Miss Kemble selected ten of the best and read them aloud without names the following Wednesday. Virginia’s and Elizabeth’s were among them. She gave them a little talk — very short — adding that one or two of the girls had seemed to have a wrong idea of service, and read Viviette’s definition without, of course, giving the name.

Virginia lingered after the others to ask Mademoiselle about Monday's lesson and to copy an example from the board which she had failed to do earlier.

When she reached the cloakroom several of the girls were in the outer hall talking. All at once she heard Juliet Anderson's voice: "But, Viviette, you talk so much about people being common; what do you mean by it?"

"Well, there's an example right here in school," Viviette replied with a light laugh. "It's that little, queer country girl, Virginia Hammond. Her father is a truck farmer and her mother is Miss Marshall's sister and was something in an Asylum — just common work people. I'm sort of a detective — my mother's that kind — and I've found out all about her. She hasn't been anywhere or seen anything. She isn't our kind at all!"

“ You seemed quite fond of her,” some one observed drily.

“ Oh, that was all a scheme to draw her out and hear her breaks and her childlike innocence. I’ve had lots of fun doing it.”

Then Elizabeth Jordan’s voice, clear and direct: “ Why, Viviette Gordon, what do you mean? Virginia is as refined and as much a lady as any one I know, and Miss Kemble praised her English in class to-day; said she must have had unusual home training. And she is so dainty and pretty. She has happened to live on a farm, but that’s no disgrace. Our best people are farmers. The idea of calling her common!”

Virginia had stood there hardly knowing that she was listening. Her thoughts were on Miss Kemble’s little talk and she felt that service was a fine thing. As she comprehended Viviette’s words her first

impulse was to confront her; her next, to find some way of escape. She remembered the side entrance into an alley. She slipped through the empty schoolrooms and out of the door; then hurried on, almost running so that she might escape meeting the group of loiterers.

Miss Marshall's little flat looked like a city of refuge. She ran up the steps like a wounded thing. Fortunately, it was Bertha's afternoon out and the rooms were empty. She threw herself on her little white bed too shocked and hurt even to cry. She could not believe that the girl who had seemed her friend, whom she had humbly adored, was false! Open and straightforward herself, Virginia despised deceit and double-dealing. She could not understand it. Then anger succeeded the hurt. They were all alike except Elizabeth. They couldn't appreciate anything



but wealth and position and display. Viviette only expressed what they all — at least the set to which she belonged — felt. She would not stay. She would write to Ma and beg to come home. She would rather never know anything if in knowing she must be as hard and unkind as it seemed to make these schoolmates of hers.

Virginia had not known she could be so angry. It fairly frightened her. And then, gradually, common sense — of which she had a by no means small share — came to her aid. Elizabeth was true and what she seemed, and doubtless many others were the same. It was most improbable that she and Elizabeth were the only two among a hundred who were honest and sincere. She, herself, had been blinded by Viviette's beauty and manner, and had looked no further. And because

of one — or even a dozen girls of that character — was she to throw away her chance and Ma's generous gift, and run away like a coward? Poor Virginia! it was her first experience of treachery, and the blow was a sharp one.

Suddenly the telephone rang. She dragged herself into the dining-room to answer it. Telephones and gas were never-ceasing marvels to her.


Elizabeth Jordan's voice, gay and friendly, said: "Is that you, Virginia? Mother wants to know if you will go with us Saturday afternoon to the *matinée*. It is to be a sweet, old-fashioned play, 'The Old Homestead,' at the Southern. We shall call for you at a quarter of two in the machine, and Mother wants to know if you won't go home with us to dinner?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Elizabeth.

I must ask Miss Marshall, but I'm almost sure she will say yes. It is so kind of your mother."

"We asked you ahead so as to be sure of you. We wanted you before but Father was ill. Let me know as soon as you find out. Good-by."

Virginia turned away, her heart lighter. The world was not very grey after all. To see a real play, with a fine company! And then to go to Elizabeth's home! Above all, to think that Elizabeth wanted her, and cared for her! Virginia bathed her flushed face and made herself tidy for dinner.



## CHAPTER X

### A RED LETTER DAY

**T**HE long looked for day and hour arrived. Saturday was bright and sunny.

Virginia, in her olive suit, ran down the steps and sprang into the touring car, seating herself between Elizabeth and her mother. The latter scanned her so earnestly that Virginia felt embarrassed.

“Excuse me, my dear, but you look so like a dear friend of my girlhood that it is startling. Her name was Margaret Leighton.”

“She was my mother.”

“But Elizabeth told me that your mother was Miss Marshall.”

Virginia looked eagerly at the house. She followed the Jordans into the wide hall as if in a dream. Elizabeth led her up-stairs to take off her wraps. Then she showed her over the house.

In one room was an alcove.

“There is where Mother had to stay when she told her first lie; all day long. She never forgot it.”

She went back to Elizabeth’s room.

“This must have been her room,” she said. “Her bed was in that corner though, and her book-case where your bed is; she always wanted me to see it.”

“Couldn’t she bring you?” asked Elizabeth gently.

“No,” Virginia said sadly, “she couldn’t bring me.”

But no one could be sad long with Elizabeth. Joy seemed to bubble over

and envelope those about her. She seemed born to dance through life.

The beautiful dining-room held pieces of Virginia's grandfather's old mahogany: the broad sideboard, the side table, and a settle by the old-fashioned fireplace.

"I am only keeping them for your aunt," Mrs. Jordan explained, "but she is so in love with the life abroad that I doubt if she ever makes her home here. After her husband's death I thought she might return, but I heard last summer that she had gone to Egypt and Palestine. She rarely writes letters."

Virginia listened politely, but she was glad when Mr. Jordan and his son came in, the former a short, thick-set man with a young face and white hair, and Theodore a college junior. Virginia had never seen such beautiful china, cut glass and

silver, and she was grateful to her mother for having through all her hard life kept up the customs of her old home in many details. So the little country maid had no trouble in regard to her numerous forks and spoons, and the Jordans were all so easy and pleasant she could not long feel herself a stranger.

“And how is my Lady Brag these days?” Theodore asked of his sister.

His mother shook her head at him, and Elizabeth said quickly with a glance at Virginia: “Not fair, Theo; she is her friend.”

“Well, if a fellow can’t ask about his friends,” Theodore replied with an injured air, and then asked Virginia about the play.

Virginia forgot herself entirely as she described her feelings in regard to some

of the scenes, and was as natural as she was in her own home.

Mrs. Jordan wanted to know about Bob and Janet and their home-life, and Virginia's account of some of the children's pranks set them all laughing.

"I never could have left them except with Ma," the girl said soberly.

"Your stepmother?" asked Mrs. Jordan.

"Yes; she is so good to us. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for her. She seems only to live to make us happy." Virginia's eyes glowed with feeling.

"That is surely a genuine tribute; she must be a good woman to call it forth," said Mr. Jordan heartily.

"Virginia," said Elizabeth, when the dessert was served, "I've made a half engagement for us for this evening, but you're to do exactly as you please about



it. Mrs. Oliver is to entertain our King's Daughters and she asked me to bring you."

"I should dearly love to go," Virginia responded. "She and Dr. Oliver asked me to join, but Miss Marshall asked me to wait a while as she thought my school work was all I could manage at present; and I can't sew at all, only mend." Virginia blushed as she confessed her shortcomings.

"Oh, we do other things besides sew, and we have dandy times. The girls love Mrs. Oliver, and her baby is a dear!" Elizabeth was nothing if not enthusiastic.

Dr. and Mrs. Oliver had called on Virginia but when she returned the call they were out. The rectory adjoined the beautiful stone church. Theodore escorted the girls thither.

The moment you entered the house you

felt its home atmosphere. Open fires — if they were natural gas — were in every room; everything was tasteful, cozy, and charming, yet there were very few expensive articles in the whole house.

About twenty girls were present; half of them Miss Kemble's pupils and so not strangers. Never had Virginia experienced so much fun and jollity. Mrs. Oliver had prepared from pictures ten cards representing some book for young people which they were to guess, the one having the most receiving a prize in the form of a toy pumpkin full of nut meats. It was given to a quiet, lame girl, whose bright face interested Virginia. She remembered her name, Lucy Jenkins.

They had some old time games: " Hunt the Slipper," " I love my love with an A," " Forfeits," and " Lift the Gates." While they quieted down to enjoy the delicious

hot chocolate and homemade ice-cream, Mrs. Oliver said in that quiet yet distinct voice, which always commanded attention:

“Girls, Dr. Oliver is in a dilemma. The Girls’ Friendly is to have a dance next Friday evening and he can’t find any one to play for them. Will any one here volunteer?”

No one answered. Then Virginia’s eager voice broke the silence.

“I can play dance music, if some one will accompany me on the piano. I fiddle a little, and I think that Miss Marshall will be willing for me to do it, as Friday and Saturday evenings are free.”

“Why, Virginia Hammond, I didn’t know you played the violin! I can play accompaniments if they’re not too difficult,” cried Elizabeth.

Mrs. Oliver’s face brightened.

“That is such a relief; thank you so much, my dear girls. Now we must end the evening with a Virginia reel.”

She ran to the piano and struck the opening chords of a popular melody. The girls formed in lines, Elizabeth whispering to Virginia that it was very easy. She placed her well down the row, so that by the time it came her turn Virginia went through the figure very creditably. Before putting on their wraps Mrs. Oliver allowed them to peep into the nursery to see the Angel of the Rectory, a dear little year-old girl with soft rings of golden hair, her fair little face, innocent and sweet, one chubby hand out of the coverlet. A wave of homesickness swept over Virginia's heart as she looked. If only she might see mischievous Bob and her baby Janet!

Theodore and Elizabeth took her home

in the machine. Virginia gave Elizabeth's hand an affectionate squeeze at parting.

"What a lovely time you've all given me! I can't find words to thank you."

A new girl, flushed, excited and happy, burst into the little room where Miss Marshall sat reading.

"I never had such a day in all my life!" she declared with vivacity.

Miss Marshall looked at her in surprise.

"I hardly know you, Virginia; tell me what wonders you have seen!"

The girl threw herself into a big chair and gave a graphic account of her doings.

"And just think of walking right into my grandfather's house and knowing my mother's old friend!" she exclaimed in conclusion. "And she thinks I'm so like her, and Mrs. Oliver was just as nice to me as if she had known me always, and Elizabeth was the life of the whole party,

and oh, do you think I may play for the Girls' Friendly?"

"Well, I'm willing, and I should say the way I heard you reeling off dance music the other day, there's no serious obstacle in the way of your handling a violin," Miss Marshall observed in her dry manner.

Virginia started to bed with her usual "Good night," but at the door she turned and came back. One arm stole timidly about the woman's neck and a kiss was imprinted on her left ear, for Virginia was frightened at her temerity and missed her aim.

"I'm so happy, and you're so kind, and everybody else and Ma does so much I just must do something," she burst forth rather incoherently, and vanished.

"Well!" ejaculated the astonished woman looking at the empty doorway. "Well, she is all upset, sure."

She turned to her book but somehow the pages had lost their interest. Miss Marshall had often declared that she loved her independence, and that she didn't know the meaning of loneliness. But to-night her heart felt strangely stirred. Virginia all unknowing, had won a place there, and the sight of her innocent happiness and girlish beauty had touched her in spite of herself. She declared that she disliked demonstrations of affection, but Virginia's impulsive caress gave her a distinct feeling of pleasure.

"I really believe she likes me," she said aloud, "and I'm afraid I am learning to care for her too much, and I must stop at once, for it will upset all my plans and theory of life and will be so dreadfully inconvenient besides!"

## CHAPTER XI

### CULINARY ARTS AND FIDDLING

**T**HE day before Thanksgiving Virginia hurried home from school. She often did this to avoid Viviette, for she felt that she could not submit to the girl's patronage now that she knew her motive. But this time there was another reason. She was to help Bertha with a plum pudding for next day. In Miss Marshall's opinion, all pies were rank poison. Plum pudding was much better, but it must not be too rich, and must always be served with maple sauce.

Bertha had everything ready when Virginia, enveloped in a big white apron, entered the tiny kitchen. She had pored over cook-books the evening before, and



she and Miss Marshall had decided on a recipe. Soon they were beating, mixing, and talking. Virginia fancied that the usually cheerful little German maid was more grave than usual, and she soon drew from her the cause.

“The girls they are in our Lutheran Sunday School class and they speak with me now that I talk English so good. I practise nights with my brother who plays the piano in a picture show,” Bertha informed her proudly. “They all get off to-morrow to go to a grand show — it is a concert given at Glendale by a German church. They go on the cars without engines or coal, and they have much fun. Barbara Liebenderfer say it’s the time of all lives, and the music it will be a peach. There! the pudding is all in the powder cans; oh, if they should burn! I hoped they could be boiled, but Miss Marshall

she is against it. She thinks an oven holds health much better than the steam on top of the stove. The third pudding is to go to Miss Kelp on the corner, 'cause she is old and cross and Miss Marshall say it is her that she will be like some day and she is sorry. I do not understand why she must be like that when there is many years to work against such a thing, but Miss Marshall it is who says many things which cannot get into my brains."

Virginia had never heard Bertha talk so much before. "Poor thing! it is because she is so much alone, and I am a girl, too, and can understand," she thought.

"Bertha," aloud, "why don't you ask Miss Marshall if you can get off too tomorrow?"

Bertha shook her yellow head decidedly.

"Ach, my mother say she will take my

head if I so much as hint about it. She say these Americans have the nerves to do bold things, and that I am not to go after them, now mind. I am to work not play, and this place is far too easy for a healthy girl like me. It is true, Miss Virgin, but old as I am I likes to play and have fun. It is the wicked one which works in my soul, and I cannot always turn my back on him. By to-morrow my back will be stronger, but to-day it is leaning to one side."

Bertha sighed over the depravity of her nature and turned to her oven. Both girls watched with bated breath and hovering arms over the precious pudding moulds, and when they were done at last and came out without breaking, and were set away to cool before packed in the tin box, Virginia felt that she could go to her violin with an easy conscience.

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But she could hardly wait for Miss Marshall to come home. When she finally came up in the elevator, Virginia followed her to her room. She closed the door after her, and came close to her side.

“I want to ask a favor of you,” she began in a low, mysterious voice; “I want to know if you would be afraid to let me do the work to-morrow instead of Bertha. I found out quite by accident that she has been invited to go to a day concert, and she has been so faithful I wondered if she might not get off.”

Virginia awaited Miss Marshall's reply with painful anxiety.

“It will spoil her,” declared that lady with decision, “but I suppose she might go this once. And we could take our dinner at the café on the corner.”

“Oh, do let me try; I cooked at home, you know, and father thought that I did

pretty well, and I would love to do it," urged Virginia.

"It isn't because I'm afraid for my dinner, but because I don't want you to spend most of your holiday in the kitchen. But have your own way."

To see Bertha's face when Virginia told her that she need not come next day and could go home after dinner, was reward enough for her trouble.

"And don't let it spoil you," begged Virginia, smiling at her, "for then I shall be to blame."

Bertha looked at her solemnly. "I shall not spoil, I shall set me on the ice chest first; and I shall get the homesick if you don't let me wait on you all days. I tell my mother you are not a proud American, but nice and common. I thank you centuries of times."

She made a queer little curtsy, and Vir-

ginia heard her singing softly as she served the dinner. That evening Miss Marshall said in her most abrupt manner:

“Why don’t you ask Elizabeth Jordan to dinner to-morrow?”

“Oh, what bliss!” cried Virginia, “I had to pinch myself to keep from asking you, but I knew how tired you were. Are you sure you won’t mind?”

“I needn’t stay long; I can go to my room,” was Miss Marshall’s concession to her unusual proceeding.

“And I’m to go to Elizabeth’s to practise for Friday night after I do the dishes,” Virginia reminded her.

Next day at twelve came Elizabeth escorted by Theodore. The latter followed her into the little room where Miss Marshall sat reading the paper.

“Theodore was determined to meet

you," Elizabeth said as she introduced herself and him to her hostess, "but he won't stay long, and Virginia promised I might help her."

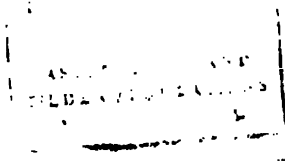
"Indeed you may," said a laughing voice from the dining-room portiêre, and Virginia, enveloped in a gingham apron, came in to meet her friends. The two girls waited for Theodore to leave, but that young gentleman had no intention of doing so.

"I know your good heart, kind lady," he said, turning to Miss Marshall, "and I've come to beg. My father and mother are invited out to dine and their friends didn't want me. I'm too young to go with them and too old to go with Elizabeth, so between the two I'm deserted. The cook is on the high strike because she must stay at home for a boy she used to put to bed. And so I've come to you for



“ THEODORE, IN MISS MARSHALL’S BIG APRON, WALKED IN ON THEM.”





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a crust. I can work to pay for it. Dish-washing is my long suit, and as a waiter I'm excellent, if I don't stumble with the best china, which gets on my nerves."

"Why, Theodore Jordan!" His sister's horrified voice reached his ears, but he stood unmoved. Virginia wanted to laugh, but instead she looked anxiously at Miss Marshall. How would she take it?

But that lady rose to the occasion.

"I'm sure we shall be glad to share our crust with you, Mr. Theodore," she said graciously. The girls fled to the kitchen, as Virginia's nose scented a possible scorch. Five minutes later Theodore, in Miss Marshall's big apron, walked in on them.

"I've come to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow," he announced meekly but with dancing eyes.

“ I never imagined such cheek ! ” Elizabeth declared, trying to frown.

“ Appearances are deceitful. I had to keep on because if I didn't I would have flunked, ” Theodore confessed.

“ What would Mother say ? ”

“ She won't know it if you don't tell, ” retorted Theodore. As a matter of fact he told her himself next day.

Never had the doll kitchen known such improper and unseemly actions ! Bertha's demure little ghost would have shivered with apprehension even while her “ wicked soul ” rejoiced.

“ It reminds me of Grace and Alan, ” Virginia declared ; and then she had to tell about her two friends and of Bertha as well.

Theodore, who was nineteen and affected only girls of his own age and older, condescended to admit later to his sister

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that her new friend was a nice little girl with no nonsense about her, and really she was very entertaining and good fun, and that he hadn't had such a lark since he was a kid!

Secretly Virginia's heart quaked over the dinner. What if it should not turn out well? She would die of shame!

But the duck was done to a turn; the brown gravy was pronounced delicious, the potatoes au gratin were equally good; the simple vegetable salad Miss Marshall deigned to praise highly; the pudding, grapes, nuts, and coffee ended the feast. Altogether the little cook, flushed and happy, felt that her venture had been a success.

It did not take long for the three to wash the dishes. Miss Marshall retired to her room for a nap, but not until she had lingered about the kitchen on one

pretext or another. It did seem strange to have young people about. It was certainly noisy, but the noise was cheerful and the laughter rang out as if from the heart. Miss Marshall and Ma had not known much of youth, but the experience had acted differently on the different natures. Nothing could embitter Ma, but the younger sister, while generous as to money, felt deep down in her heart a sense of injury and of defrauded years. She would never admit it, and struck the few who cared enough to notice as a woman sufficient to herself and asking favors of no one. The three young people were off before three o'clock, the girls to practise and Theodore to a ball game, the last of the season.

Friday night saw two pale and frightened girls tuning instruments in Rutherford Hall. Even Elizabeth's ready laugh

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was checked, and Virginia's hands were icy cold. She had never played before save to two or three intimate friends, and to play for dancing meant smooth execution and an untiring hand.

Mrs. Oliver had procured a better violin for her use, and when the leader, a tall black-haired girl, gave the signal Virginia found herself handling the bow with at least outward calm and readiness. For some time she dared not look about, but as the evening advanced, she and Elizabeth threw themselves into the spirit of it and Virginia looked with interest at the merry group as they danced the different figures, some with unusual grace and all with an abandon and enjoyment Virginia had seldom seen.

Mrs. Oliver had told her much of the Girls' Friendly. They were all working girls. The Club formed a safe place for

amusement and work in the evenings. Books, games and music for dancing were provided as well as chaperons; but the girls ran it quite independently. This year they were employing a dressmaker two evenings of the week to teach them how to make part at least of their own clothes and save their wages; a milliner came once a week. Once a month they invited their gentleman friends and served light refreshments. They had a concert now and then, and lectures with stereopticon views. The restrictions were moderate hours and chaperons. The latter were real friends, and many a time a girl confided to one of them concerning some trouble and was helped, and unconsciously to the girls their influence helped them to a higher plane.

During the intermission a young girl came up to the girls.

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“I want to thank you for all of us,” she said cordially. “Your music,” turning to Virginia, “would make a clodhopper dance.”

Virginia liked the sensible, pleasant face immensely, though Elizabeth declared it wasn't the face but the praise she liked.

She found that her name was Margaret Lindsay, and Virginia liked her the better for bearing her mother's name. She talked to her and drew her out — Virginia was learning this art from Elizabeth — and liked her the more. She looked like a girl who had seen little of the merry side of life.

The dancing recommenced, then the hour for leaving came. Several others came up to thank the girls for their services.

Theodore called for them in the ma-



chine, as the chauffeur had a night off. They took in one of the chaperons, who told them on the way home something further of Margaret Lindsay. Her father had been a cab driver for years, and at his sudden death the girl resolved to carry on his business. Her only brother was far too young, and she was strong and well. She did very well for a year and a half when the constant exposure told on her health, and the doctor insisted on her giving it up. She had a place now as a clerk in a store, but her wages were small and the family needs greater. She was learning dressmaking and was quite expert. She hoped soon to be able to get work under some one. The family seemed quite above the common, and the girl, Mrs. Gabriel declared warmly, was a brave, honest, Scotch lassie.

“It makes me ashamed to hear of such

girls!" Virginia confessed. "I don't feel as if I amounted to anything! I looked at them — all earning a living at least — and I admired them."

"I respect them, but I'm afraid I don't want to follow their example," Elizabeth declared. "My studies are all I can manage, and I don't hanker after them."

Virginia told Miss Marshall of Margaret Lindsay, secretly hoping that she might offer to employ her; but she showed a most discouraging indifference to Virginia's animated account, and Virginia went to bed with a keen feeling of disappointment over her failure, but with a sensation equally keen over her evening, and the fact that Miss Marshall had consented to her playing for the girls once a month.

"And you can't have everything or

you'd get spoiled; I have too many good times to feel unhappy for a minute," Virginia decided, as she turned over and fell asleep at once.

## CHAPTER XII

### A REAL LIVE BARONESS

**T**HE girls at Miss Kemble's had a fad just now for selecting a motto or legend for their own use. A few adopted the ones with the family coat-of-arms. Virginia was greatly interested in English History, which she was studying under Miss Kemble. She wanted to take the Ich dien (I serve) of the Black Prince, but feared it was presumptuous. Now she decided to do so.

"I've never done much for others so far; but I'm now trying to do little things like fiddling for the girls, and giving up my own way for others now and then, and

if I take 'I serve' for my motto it may urge me on, as it did the Prince, to do more; who knows?"

She was thinking of this and wishing that she might meet Elizabeth, when she almost ran into Geraldine Hampton.

"Have you heard the news, Virginia?" she asked at once, fairly bursting with importance. "We're to have a real Baroness to speak to us to-day. She is French and used to go to school in Paris with Miss Kemble. She is travelling in this country to get notes for a book."

"Then she's an authoress as well as a Baroness," said Virginia laughing. "I don't see how we can have so much greatness all at once!"

But Geraldine looked very serious.

"I do hope she will talk a long while so she will use up our recitation hour;

and that her clothes will be swell, and that she will use enough English so that we may understand her.”

“It will be fine for Madame Frédin and Mademoiselle to see some one from home,” observed Virginia thoughtfully.

“Oh, they are wage-earners and a lady of title will not notice them,” asserted Geraldine quickly. “They are not like us, going with Tom, Dick and Harry; they appreciate blue blood. I often wish that my ancestors had never come to this country. Just think how delightful to live in England as one of the nobility, for we descended from the Earl of Hampton, you know!”

Virginia was greatly amused. As she went to her seat, she thought: “Viviette is not the only Lady Brag.” Elizabeth hurried after her.

“Are you scared to death?” she asked.

“Just think how lonesome it must feel to be the only noble creature in a whole country!”

Virginia leaned towards her.

“I always meant to ask you about Geraldine Hampton’s mourning.”

To the girl’s surprise Elizabeth smothered a laugh.

“Perhaps it’s for the Earl of Hampton,” she said; “there’s no one else. A young girl came here a few months ago from New York who wore black and white, and Geraldine has worn nothing else since. She says colors are so loud, and show that one is of the common herd!”

Both girls giggled, but the bell sounding there was a general orderly movement for seats; then quiet, while the school watched the door eagerly for Miss Kemble and her guest.

The Baroness de Lavalie proved to be

a large woman with a strong, intelligent, homely face. After a brief introduction she said in fairly good English:

“I am struck with the freedom everywhere of the American girls. It speaks well for them that with it as well as the indulgence everywhere apparent they are as unspoiled as they are; but would not a little more restraint be better? I suppose to you this is far from welcome, my dear young ladies; to you the protection and safeguards we throw about our French girls would be irksome in the extreme. It may be that we go too far. Cannot we learn of each other? East and West I have met charming girls; I have been in your schools where the honor system prevails, and I am assured it is seldom betrayed. Honor and uprightness are certainly the foundation of character, and I know some very honest American girls.



In the larger schools I hear much, however, of scheming and deception. I often wonder if it all pays. The result is so disastrous, so overwhelming as to character. I do not intend to give you a sermon, but I say to you as I do to my French girl friends: 'Cultivate openness and a high regard for truth.' It will not prevent enjoyment — what you call fun; and it will make you very grateful in the years to come. I am glad to have met you. You enjoy here much of what our French girls are denied, and I am filled with admiration for your wonderful country. I bid you good morning."

And, to Geraldine Hampton's amazement, the Baroness, in a simple but exquisitely fitting gown, hurried off with Madame Frédin to meet an engagement.

"So soon was it done for, what was it

begun for?" quoted the irrepressible Elizabeth in Virginia's ear.

One result, however, of the Baroness' brief stay was most unexpected. The day following her departure, Miss Kemble addressed the school as follows:

"My friend, the Baronne de Lavallo, insists upon it that American girls with all their advantages lose much that is a matter of course with their French cousins. She refers to matters domestic and culinary. I have determined to try an experiment. I shall from time to time have competitions with prizes for trials of skill in home-keeping arts. Friday I shall ask the older classes, the First and Second, to bring here each a cake or a pie, or both, of their own manufacture with no help whatever from any one. No matter how poor the result, I shall expect it to be brought, and I trust entirely to your

honor. Later I hope to have a teacher in such useful arts."

There was considerable excitement after school that day among the pupils. Most of them were indignant and rebellious. Virginia, however, hoped that here she might be able to excel. Bertha shared her hopes and fears. She could not understand why "Miss Virgin" wouldn't even allow her to beat the eggs or roll out the pie crust.

"I must do it all myself, even to the crumbs," she insisted.

"I believe you will win first prize," Miss Marshall declared. She hadn't believed she would ever have been so anxious in regard to cake and those enemies of mankind, pies.

Friday an unwonted scene appeared on some of the streets of the city. Young girls were seen carrying baskets in the

direction of the school. Some had the assistance of maids, others arrived in carriages and autos.

In one of the long rooms on tables were the assortment. Cakes and pies of all sorts and conditions, light and heavy, white and colored, humpy and smooth. Three ladies were the judges, whose daughters did not compete. When Miss Kemble announced the result, many glanced meaningly at Virginia, for they were sure the first prize would be hers. There was a little pause; then Miss Kemble's rarely beautiful voice said:

"The first prize for the best cake and pie is awarded to Viviette Gordon, the second to Virginia Hammond."

There was a little murmur of astonishment. Virginia thought she must not have heard aright.

Viviette, triumphant, important, came

forward to take the pretty silver purse.

Then Virginia was given a book. She could hardly repress a cry of delight when she saw what it was. A beautifully bound and illustrated copy of "Lorna Doone" was inside the white wrapping.

Some of the girls crowded around her after school to congratulate her and to see her prize, also to express their amazement that Viviette should have won the first.

But Virginia's face beamed with gratification: "Don't say a word; I've always wanted to read 'Lorna Doone,' and now I own it, and such a lovely copy!"

She heard Viviette's voice, cool and assured: "It's nothing; any one can make such things if they bend their minds to it. I never cooked before, but I always knew I could if I chose," she asserted with more confidence than grammar.

Meanwhile Elizabeth walked home with Virginia.

“You needn’t tell me; Viviette Gordon never made her cake and pie.”

“Don’t say that, Elizabeth! I believe that it’s as she says: she is one of those bright, quick girls who can turn her hand to anything!”

Elizabeth shook her head in denial, but said no more about it.

“Theo says he’s so glad he isn’t one of the poor to get my cake, that lead is a feather beside it,” Elizabeth declared. “I hung over it enough, but all the raisins would go to the bottom, and although I put oceans of baking powder in it, it fell as flat as some of these airships. You know Miss Kemble is to give all the food to the W. C. T. U. for distribution! I feel as if I ought to send a doctor along with my cake.”

Monday Viviette appeared at school with her younger sister.

“The nurse has left, and Mamma is to play bridge this morning, so she made me bring Clementine,—a perfect bore! I don’t believe she will want to come again,” she added viciously.

Miss Kemble, who was fond of children, received the little girl graciously. School had opened when she called the child to her desk to give her some photographs to look at.

“Do you think you will ever be such a famous cook as your sister?” she asked pleasantly.

And clearly, in a high childish treble, came the startling answer:

“Oh, Viviette doesn’t cook! I know she got a purse for that big cake and pie, but our French chef made them both, and he made an awful kick, too, till

Viviette had to pay him more money for it.”

The classes were called. Viviette was closeted with Miss Kemble after the day's dismissal. Next day she failed to appear, and a week later she entered another school.

“I really could not stand that Noah's Ark of Miss Kemble's an hour longer!” she declared to her new schoolmates.

Virginia could not enjoy her triumph.

“It must be so uncomfortable inside to be like Viviette,” she told Elizabeth.

The days were bringing Christmas very near. Ma wrote every week, and sometimes Bob and Janet enclosed fearfully spelled and blotted expressions of love and longing, which Virginia read and re-read and carried about. She wondered how she could wait another day to see them. Grace wrote irregularly. She felt the im-



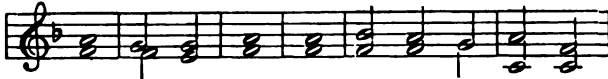
portance of being a High School senior, and was very busy.

“I haven’t any real chum now that you’re gone, Jinny,” she wrote, “and you don’t know how I miss you. Don’t let your new friends crowd out the old, but I know you too well to even think of such a dreadful thing. Father has bought a new sleigh, and now I’m afraid there won’t be snow in the holidays so that I can take you driving. We must go, if it’s in the mud! Do hurry up the hours; they never went so slowly. I see the Flahertys now and then, and they always ask about you, and Dennis always adds: ‘I hope she’s workin’ on the fiddle; mark me words, Miss Grace, there’s no common strummer; she’s the rale thing! Some day other folks will sit up an’ take notice; but she nades a foine tacher. She knows all I do be knowin’ now.’”

Virginia read the last with a pang. Would she ever be able to have a teacher? She had not heard from Alan since he first entered college, but the day before she left for home came a letter and a small package. The latter she laid aside for the great day at home. The letter she read eagerly.

“I don’t see why I don’t write oftener, Jinny. When I was on the ranch there was too much going on, and now that I’m in this big University, things don’t go, they whiz. When I see the really brilliant fellows I feel ashamed that I don’t do better; but I do hate to grind. Mr. and Mrs. Black think that my standing is O. K., but I could make it higher.

“My best chum is Jack Wisdom. When he first came, whenever he made a remark and a lot of fellows were around, they would at once begin chanting:

*The Fiddling Girl*

And w - is - dom speaks in ev - ery li - ne.

(I never could write music!) But they say it's no fun teasing Jack, for he never minds it any more than a squirrel shinning up a tree.

“I tell you, your letter just made me want to yell. It seemed so good to think of you having things as your mother longed to have for you. Three cheers for Ma! I go to the ranch this week-end. It's home all right. I made you a little gift. It ought to be covered with jewels, but just wait till I get to work. You'll have violin lessons then; but I'm afraid you'll be white-haired by that time. I shall think of you on the farm Christmas. If I don't write I never forget my oldest friends, especially Jinny. Jack is whistling for me to play ball to get warmed

up, for it's as cold as Greenland. Merry Christmas. ALAN."

Virginia looked up as Miss Marshall came in: "I'm always forgetting to tell you, Virginia," she said with elaborate indifference, "that Margaret Lindsay is sewing for me. She does better than I expected."

"How queer that she should go to you!" Virginia exclaimed, "for you always have first-class helpers."

"She didn't," Miss Marshall said in her coolest manner. "I thought I might as well hunt her up; we're in a rush now."

"That was lovely, but it's just like you; that's another thing for Christmas!" exclaimed the girl joyously.

After Miss Marshall was gone, Virginia ran to her drawer and looked for the dozenth time at her array of little gifts. Ma

had kept her in a small amount of spending money each week for car fare and pin money. Many was the time Virginia had walked miles to save money for Christmas giving. There was the doll for Janet, the games for Bob, the jabot for Miss Marshall, the belt for Bertha, the handkerchief for Grace, the tie for Lucinda. She had sent Alan a paper knife. For Ma she had made a clothes-bag and dusters, her father two shaving towels and Elizabeth a pretty bag — labors of love indeed, for Virginia hated sewing as she did mathematics, and her stitches were not apt to need a magnifying glass to see. For the Flahertys she had found a little picture of an Irish scene.

“I couldn’t have done it if there weren’t such bargains in a city!” sighed Virginia from the fulness of her content. She put them carefully into her trunk except those

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for the three at Carlisle. Miss Marshall was expecting company for the whole week.

Virginia's trunk had been partially packed for days. She wondered now if anything had been forgotten! For early next morning she was to leave for home, home, HOME!

## CHAPTER XIII

### WHICH TREATS OF VARIOUS THINGS

“**I** SUPPOSE Arabella Trouton will git saved, but I’m sure she’ll keep other folks from bein’!” Lucinda Dildine stopped rubbing the clothes as she announced this opinion to Virginia, who was washing the dishes in the sink near by.

“What has Mrs. Trouton been doing?” asked the girl.

“What hain’t she ben doin’? It’s her tongue. She begun agin yer Ma before she come, and even now she won’t stop. I give her a piece of my mind yesterday, when she said that Mis’ Hammond was extravagant an’ a spendthrift lavishin’ her

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money so's Jinny could live in a city an' put on style; but what can you expect of a person who says that the Lord don't never favor immersion an' that it's only ignorant folks that does it? Oh, sometimes, Jinny Hammond, I just set and wish the end of the world would come right now so's she'd know that we're right and she's dead wrong. I'd just like to see how surprised she'll be when she hears it an' can't answer back!" Lucinda rubbed as vigorously as if Janet's apron were Mrs. Troutner herself.

"Don't mind Mrs. Troutner, Lucinda," Virginia urged. "What does she matter when I'm home?"

She waved her towel over her head and danced over to Miss Dildine, took her about the waist, and whirled her around and around the room.

"Why, Jinny, you're crazy! Dancin's



w-w-wicked!" stammered the amazed woman.

Virginia danced back to her dishes.

"If you feel that way about it, why do you go back?" Lucinda eyed the girl eagerly, as she asked the question. Horses couldn't have dragged it from her, but the fact was that she had missed Virginia dreadfully, and would have given her most cherished possession — which happened to be a pair of gold earrings with big yellow stones in them — if she might stay at home.

"Oh, Carlisle's the finest place I ever saw, and I have the best times there, and it's my Mother's city, you know, and I love it, even if it isn't very clean; and I'm learning just as Mother would want me to do, but I love home, too, and I just long to see it and all of you folks when I'm away. It's awful to be two people; that

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is, it is inconvenient, — one the country Virginia and the other the city one.” She drew a long breath after this outburst. Then she told Lucinda of her friends in Carlisle and of the school and Miss Marshall and Bertha, and of her mother’s portrait in the Art Gallery.

“It’s a great comfort to run in and look into her eyes. How I would love to own it!” she sighed. “It’s even better than the one we have.”

The dishes put away, Virginia dashed into the living-room where Ma, her work done, was mending. She didn’t want to lose a minute.

“I’m going to sit with you for awhile,” she said, as she helped herself to the basket of stockings, “for I’ve only two days more.” She told Ma of Lucinda’s remarks regarding Mrs. Troutner, though she omitted the part relating to her stepmother.

“Everybody thinks they’re the only ones who are right,” she ended, getting her pronouns rather mixed. “It puzzles me.”

“Well, as long as folks are so different, there’ll always be some that need forms to help ’em along, an’ some don’t want any, and others like only a little. I don’t see as it makes any difference about the way they worship, just so they have enough love to go round. I guess folks’ll find out some day after they’ve worn themselves out arguing and studying that love will solve all the problems. But it sounds too easy to be true, and they worry on.

“Lucinda is a good soul, but she’s queer,” Ma went on. “One day she came to work and I saw she was all upset. I guess things at home had gone wrong — her sister’s husband and son are so worth-

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less — and she burst out: 'Well, Mis' Hammond, this ends it. I ain't comin' to work any more. It's too far, and I'm no spring chicken.' 'Do you really mean it?' I asked. 'Shall I hunt another woman?' 'Yes, right away. I can't come next wash-day.' Well, your father scurried around the country and finally engaged a colored woman. Friday Lucinda came out to bring some cashmere she had dyed for me. I told her I had succeeded in getting a woman, when to my surprise she gave me the worst scoring I've had in many a year. 'I think I deserve better treatment than that, after the way I've worked for this family year in and year out,' she burst forth; 'and now to be turned out of doors for a strange woman, and black at that! Jinny wouldn't have done such a trick. Just because I'm not so spry as I once was to

turn me down! I've always said if they was a kind woman on earth it was Mis' Hammond, but I take it back.' 'But, Lucinda,' I managed to say, 'don't you remember you told me to do it?' 'What if I did? Just because a person is all riled up inside an' tired an' her back aches an' she talks some to make herself feel better, isn't any reason why folks have to run out the door an' hunt up somebody to take her place!' Well," Ma concluded, "Lucinda sniffed and mopped her eyes and kept saying: 'To think of anybody else washin' fur those blessed children,' and I apologized and asked her to come on Monday, your father went off to tell the woman there had been some mistake, and all was peace!"

The children suddenly burst in eager to tell of their adventures at the big hill. The coasting was the best ever, and Jinny

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must come at once and try their new sleds. For Miss Marshall had sent them sleds, bright and shiny, the like of which they had never seen, theirs having been home-made.

Christmas at the little farmhouse had been simple, but most happy. Neither of the younger children had been more delighted than the big sister. Alan's package was found to be a little picture frame carved by himself. Miss Marshall's pretty blue beads went well with the olive suit; Bob and Janet had bought her perfumery with their pennies, the strength of which nearly knocked her over; Grace had made her a dresser cover; Elizabeth's gift was an odd stick-pin. Her father had given her a little money, Ma had knit her bed shoes, and Lucinda's gift was a mat. Mrs. Flaherty sent two loaves of pound cake for the family. Ma had a small tree for

Bob and Janet in the evening and invited a few neighbors with their children.

Grace and Virginia had had the coveted sleigh-rides, and the cozy visiting dear to girls' hearts.

"The ten days seemed over before they had begun," Virginia declared.

Ma was determined that Jinny must have lessons in dancing, as she had read in the prospectus that a young girl was to give lessons beginning in January.

"Would you prefer that to violin lessons?" asked Virginia.

"Why, of course," Ma replied, "you'll have plenty of time to fiddle with Dennis when you are at home, but dancing you can only learn there."

They were at the table, and Mr. Hammond declared decidedly that of course it must be dancing. "The idea of studying such a thing as fiddling! It's only for

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play, and you know enough as it is. Then it's far more expensive than dancing, and takes much longer."

So again, Virginia's hopes were dashed to earth.

One more visit to the Flahertys and the McPhersons, one last hug for the children in spite of Bob's stiffening form, last kisses for Ma and Father, and Virginia was off. If the ten days had seemed to fly, so also did the months that followed. Miss Marshall gave the girl several unusual treats. She took her to hear Calvé in Grand Opera, to see Julia Marlowe, Mary Man-nering and Mrs. Fiske. Elizabeth and her mother took her to a violin recital given by a young girl, Vivian Peabody. Virginia listened entranced.

"She is a pupil of Miss Van Buren's," whispered Elizabeth, during the brief intermission.



“Who is Miss Van Buren?” asked Virginia.

Elizabeth raised her hands in mock horror. “Not to know Carlisle’s proudest possession!” she murmured. “Miss Van Buren,” she explained, “is considered by many musicians to be the finest American violinist. She has studied abroad for years, and taught here for some time. Her teacher in Germany declared that she was a genius. You ought to hear her play!”

Virginia came home that day with a shadow over her usually contented spirit. No matter if she did take lessons she could never handle a bow like Miss Peabody! And here she was growing older and older with no prospect of ever carrying out her heart’s desire. Then, as usual, her common sense came to her aid.

“I mustn’t let Elizabeth’s treat make

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me blue," she thought; "and after next year perhaps I can find work here and earn enough for my board and lessons. Other girls have done as much and more. Brace up, Jinny Hammond!"

The Easter vacation was so short that Virginia did not spend it at home. Indeed, there were only two school sessions in the year. The daily routine went on brightened by pleasant Saturdays at the rectory, the Jordans, and occasionally at two newer friends — Helen Harter and Mary McCabe. The monthly dances of the Girls' Friendly went on, and Virginia felt that several of the girls were more than mere acquaintances. She would have liked to know them better but both she and they led busy lives, and could come in touch but seldom.

Miss Marshall had planned to go abroad in June. It was to be partly for health

and mostly for business. She was worn out, though she scorned to admit such a humiliating fact. Will, she had always contended, could overcome physical ills, but for the first time her will failed to obey her behests. She suddenly decided to leave in May. With her usual dexterity, she settled her affairs expeditiously and well. She found Bertha an excellent place with a friend; sublet her apartment to an elderly couple, and had Virginia established at Miss Kemble's.

"You will leave in two weeks for home," she said to the former, "and the change and experience at boarding school will be a pleasant and novel one."

Virginia tried to help during the last days, and Miss Marshall delighted her heart by saying at parting: "You've been a good child, Virginia, and I shall miss you; and you've been a big help, too."

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Virginia easily adapted herself to her new life. The girls were pleasant, and the rules strict, but neither many nor irksome. The honor system worked well among the few pupils. If a girl could not be trusted, she quietly withdrew. There was no publicity, no talk, no fuss. The reputation of the school was such that a vacancy was readily filled, and Miss Kemble could have easily trebled the number of boarding pupils at any time.

The first day of June was always kept in some unusual way as a Commencement. The graduates gave their orations on certain preceding days; but the first had no exercises by the pupils. Some years a noted man or woman addressed them. This year Miss Kemble made it a purely social affair for all her pupils and their parents. The whole house down-stairs was thrown open. There was some dan-

cing and much gayety. Two soloists — one a woman vocalist, the other a young German harpist — furnished the music. Every one seemed in the spirit of the affair. There were flowers everywhere.

Virginia was glad that it was cool enough to wear her white serge dress, which was brightened by her pink coral necklace and hair ribbons. She and three others of the boarders helped the maids serve the refreshments. It was a pretty scene, and Virginia often remembered it in after years. But to-morrow was to see her starting homeward. Five months is a long time to be away from those we love, and the girl's heart turned longingly to the little farmhouse with its inmates. She had planned many things for the long summer. She meant to help Ma; to be more with the children. Then Elizabeth Jordan hoped to make her a visit after

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her trip to Canada with her family, and Virginia looked forward to bringing together her two most intimate girl chums.

But how little one knows the future! Virginia, her trunk packed and strapped, sat in her room surrounded by girls, for she was the first to leave. There was the usual commotion and hubbub. The restraint of school was over and the girls' high spirits bubbled over.

“Be sure and come back next fall.”

“May Leonard, do write to me.”

“Clara, you must room with me, don't forget.”

“Dorothy Weeks, don't be a pig with that candy!”

“Virginia, I wish you were to board here next year.”

And then there was a rap on the door and some one handed in one of those yel-

low envelopes which are so often messengers of disaster.

“Miss Virginia Hammond,” somebody read, and handed it to her.

Virginia, her heart beating with apprehension, tore it open. The words danced before her eyes as she read:

“Bob down with scarlet fever; don’t worry; see letter.                      **FATHER.**”

## CHAPTER XIV

### A NEW EXPERIENCE

**T**HE day following the coming of the telegram Virginia sat in her room reading her father's letter. He wrote that Bob bade fair to have scarlet fever, as he did everything else, thoroughly and with no light touches. Ma was with him in their room up-stairs guarding against contagion, while he and Janet were down-stairs under the care of the ever faithful Lucinda.

“Janet may have it, as she has been with Bob so constantly, but we must hope for the best. We don't know how or where Bob contracted it; but Ma will bring him through if any one will, and we must wait and be patient. It is a bitter



disappointment for you as well as the rest of us," her father ended, "but I know my girl of old, how brave she is and how much hard sense she can show in an emergency! I suppose Miss Kemble will not stay in Carlisle, but I think she will be kind enough to select some nice place for you to board, which is not expensive. I enclose some money and shall try to send more soon. Keep up a good heart, and I shall write often."

Virginia did not feel as if her sense was very hard just now. It had melted fast after she was in bed the night before and had dissolved in tears. She had thought long and earnestly, and she wanted to consult with Miss Kemble.

"It's hardest for Ma, and how thankful I am that she is with Bob!" thought the troubled girl.

The house was ominously still, for

every one had left except Miss Kemble and Miss Herschel, who were now lingering over a late breakfast. Virginia went slowly down-stairs. As she approached the dining-room, the door of which was open, Miss Kemble was saying: "She is worn out, she says, with ignorant, careless nursemaids, who teach her little girls so much she deplures, and who can't be trusted, and poor Isabelle is worn out with her husband's long illness. They're going to the country in a few days, and Isabelle says that if she could only get some refined, nice girl to take charge of the children she would feel that some day she might feel rested."

"I wonder if she would take me," said a voice from the door.

"Why, Virginia! what do you mean?" asked Miss Kemble in a startled voice. "Come here and sit down."

“Forgive me for listening,” Virginia said, flushing a little under Miss Herschel’s disapproving glance; “but your friend’s need seems my chance. I’ve just had a letter from my father, and I’m sure that they will be quarantined for several weeks. You want to close the house at once. Father wishes me to board somewhere, but I don’t see why I should stay idly in a boarding-house spending money we can’t afford when I’m strong and well and can earn something. My stepmother has been far too generous in sending me here to school, and it doesn’t seem fair to spend more than I need. I’m used to children and housework; I’m pining for the country, and I want money. Why couldn’t I apply for a situation to your friend?”

The two women looked at Virginia in ill-concealed astonishment.

“Why, my dear child, you are so young and so — well, you hardly seem fitted for being a nursemaid; and I fear your father would object,” remonstrated Miss Kemble.

“I don’t want my father to know of it for awhile; he is worried enough now. It seems to be a place where I must decide for myself. I don’t expect a bed of roses. I’ve read Miss Alcott’s ‘Work’ and ‘Life and Letters,’ and I know that she and Christie had most unpleasant times, but if a great and good person like Louisa Alcott could bear it, I certainly can stand a few weeks of it.”

As she paused, Miss Herschel spoke for the first time.

“Let her try it, Frances; it may strengthen and broaden her. As she says, it won’t be for long, and I think it’s quite refreshing to find a girl in our school will-

ing to work and who cares for somebody besides herself!" Having thus delivered herself, Miss Herschel swept from the room, her stern face relaxed and approving.

Miss Kemble looked down at the girlish form beside her. Virginia looked very young and appealing. She put her arm about her.

"I hope to know you better, dear, next term," she said. "I often wish I might come into closer touch with my day pupils. I know that your school record is excellent, but I'm just beginning to see that you're something more than a good student."

"I'm only a very ordinary girl," Virginia declared in great embarrassment; "but I believe I could take care of children."

"Well, perhaps it's as Miss Herschel

says, and the experiment will do you no harm," the teacher pondered thoughtfully. "My friend, Mrs. Armbruster, is a lady and kind, but I know her only from a friend's standpoint," she went on slowly. "I don't know her from the employee's. Sometimes they're the same, and sometimes they aren't. I shall telephone her at once."

In a few moments Miss Kemble was back.

"She says to come as soon as possible, Virginia. I have ordered a cab, and we will be off in about twenty minutes. The servants are to leave after lunch and I at four with Miss Herschel."

"Are you sure you have time to go with me?" asked Virginia.

"I shall make time; I wouldn't let you go alone," Miss Kemble replied in her usual resolute manner.

And Virginia, with relief in her heart, ran up-stairs to get ready.

Half an hour later, she was in a pretty library in a house on Fairfield Avenue awaiting the dreaded interview with her new mistress.

A pale delicate woman met them and in a few moments everything was arranged. Virginia was to come for a week on trial; her wages were to be three dollars a week; her work to be the entire care of the two little girls, their mending included, and she was to be willing to do light housework in an emergency. She was to have one afternoon a week and her evenings, except in the event of some unusual occurrence.

Miss Kemble rose to go after some talk with her friend.

“Good-by, my dear.” She turned to the new nursemaid with her encouraging

smile. Virginia choked back the rebellious tears as she clung to her for a moment, and then the teacher was gone and she found herself following her employer up-stairs.

Mrs. Armbruster threw open a door which led into a large, airy room in which an open fire burned brightly, for the day was cool. Two little girls of about five and six respectively came shyly forward. They were beautiful children, and looked much alike with long golden curls and wondering blue eyes.

Virginia's heart warmed towards them. She was very fond of children.

"I've had your trunk taken to your room; I will show you the way." Mrs. Armbruster glanced at the girl's school dress approvingly. "The gown will do," she decided, "and I furnish aprons and caps. Do you object to a cap?"



"Oh, no," replied Virginia, who was determined to carry out her new rôle to the last detail. Her room was pleasant though small.

"We are to leave the last of the week for our farm ten miles from the city," Mrs. Armbruster announced. "The cook will have the luncheon tray ready by twelve, and I shall expect you to go to the kitchen and bring it to the nursery, where you will eat with the children. They will show you about the house. I will leave you now, as I must lie down before lunch."

She looked so very fragile and worn that Virginia's heart went out to her. Just so had her mother looked for months before her death.

She quickly divested herself of her wraps, put on her new regalia, and hurried down to the nursery.

She seated herself in a big rocker.

“I wonder,” she began, looking up to the ceiling as if addressing an invisible creature, “I wonder if these two little girls ever heard of the Five Finger Plays my brother and sister liked so much?”

The little forms crept nearer and nearer. Then Hester climbed into her lap, and Ernestine on the arm of her chair, put out their fair, plump little hands, and the games began.

The hour passed on wings to the laughing, deeply absorbed children, when Virginia, glancing at the little mantel clock, sprang up saying: “I think that two little brownies will have to show me the way to the kitchen.”

The cook looked curiously at the newcomer, but spoke cordially. “The tray is ready.”

Virginia found it no slight task to carry it, but the feat was safely accomplished,

and soon the three were seated about a table, eating a very appetizing lunch.

The angelic Hester was inclined to eat with her fingers, but Virginia pretended that they were all fairy princesses and must have only the best manners or the Queen would send them into a high tree-top in the forest, there to stay till night. They had a great deal of fun over it, and Hester was very proud when Virginia praised her skill with her fork. At two Mrs. Armbruster came dressed to go out. She looked better, and declared that she had not slept so well for days.

“I hope the children are not very troublesome,” she said in her tired, sweet voice.

“They’re no trouble at all; I love children,” Virginia declared warmly.

“I wish that you would take them to walk for an hour and a half, at least.

Ernestine will show you their wraps." The mother kissed them both and was off, and a few minutes later Virginia was headed for the park, the cool breeze very grateful to her, and the unusually bracing air a needed tonic. The little girls trotted along by her side.

"I think you're the nicest nurse we ever had," ventured the grave Ernestine.

"Yes, do tell us more stories," coaxed Hester, as she skipped about joyously.

"Well, when we get to the park I shall tell you the wonderful doings of the White Cat. There is too much to see on the street to spoil it by telling stories. But I know a walking game. Let us see how many things we can count in one square. Now, what do you see, Ernestine? Your turn for this square."

"I see a wagon, and two, three men; a boy, a little girl; one, two, three, four

houses, a dog," etc. So the game went on.

Virginia was in the midst of the thrilling adventures of the White Cat seated on a bench in the beautiful park with the children on each side of her, when looking up she saw coming towards her Geraldine Hampton. She had not seen her to speak to her for two or three weeks. She was with a very showily dressed girl, a stranger.

Virginia sprang to her feet and fairly ran to meet her. It seemed nice to see some one she knew, for nearly every one had left the city.

"Why, Geraldine! I'm so glad to see you. You and I are —"

She stopped suddenly.

To her amazement Geraldine, after pausing a moment to look her over from head to foot, gave no sign of recognition

and passed on. She stood for a moment looking after her. She heard Geraldine's voice but not her words, and both girls laughed amusedly.

Virginia walked back to the children puzzled at first, then as she put her hand to her cap, she understood.

"The cut direct! I am a wage-earner like the Frédins! I surely ought not to be surprised at Geraldine's doing it. I ought not to care a bit." She struggled with herself. It was true she ought not to care, but oh, she did, she did!

"Why didn't the girls stop when you called, Jinny?" asked Ernestine. "I don't think they were very polite." While Hester's voice, impatient and eager, cried: "Oh, do tell us more of the White Cat; what did she do next?"

"Where was I? Oh, yes, she served him stewed rats and mice, but while they

may be all right for cats, people don't fancy food like that. So she changed them to peas and corn and fruit and — and — ”

“Candy and ice-cream,” Hester suggested.

The story went on, but it was to an accompaniment of Virginia's thoughts. “I didn't think girls could be such cads. Just because I'm helping Mrs. Armbruster by caring for her children, how does that change me? Because I wear an apron and cap, why am I any different from what I was at school? I thought Americans were above such snobbishness.”

The story was over; they started for home.

Virginia gave herself a little shake.

“There, vanish Geraldine; enter Hard Sense, and turn to the children! They are worth far more than foolish girls!”

She bent her mind to the task. The

children took it from her and told her stories in their turn. Suddenly Ernestine dropped her hand and ran to meet a lady coming towards them carrying a violin case in her hand.

“Oh, Aunt Paula, Aunt Paula,” she cried, “we’ve had the best time! Come and see Virginia. She’s not a bit like the others. And we don’t want her ever to go away.”

The lady came up smilingly, her free hand outstretched.

“This is Virginia Hammond,” she said cordially. “I feel so grateful to you, for I am very much worried over my sister’s health. She is all worn out, and your coming means so much to me.” Then, seeing the hesitation in Virginia’s face, she added: “Oh, you don’t know who I am, do you? I am Miss Van Buren, Mrs. Armbruster’s sister. You will see a great



deal of me, for I make my home with her.”

They were near the house, and as Virginia followed them in, she thought: “Miss Van Buren, the great violinist! Oh, Jinny Hammond, you’d better behave yourself if you’re to live with a real flesh-and-blood, gen-u-wine Genius!”

## CHAPTER XV

### THE OPEN DOOR

**V**IRGINIA saw very little of Miss Van Buren while in town. She was very busy, and Virginia was in the nursery, or helping to get ready for the family's flight. A week from the time that Virginia had engaged service at the Armbrusters she was paid her wages and asked to stay. She reminded Mrs. Armbruster that Miss Kemble had told her that she might be unable to remain longer than five or six weeks.

"I know how you are situated, but I hope you will stay with me until you're sent for to come home," Mrs. Armbruster said. "The children are so fond of you,

and I feel, Virginia, that you are so trustworthy and a lady, and that your being here is my one chance of regaining my health.”

“I shall certainly stay as long as possible, and I shall do my best to help you get well.”

Virginia, her earnings in her purse, went back to the children from the interview with a light heart.

“That was nice of Mrs. Armbruster to tell me that I suited and that she depended on me. I mean to try my very best to help her,” and Virginia’s heart declared added loyalty to the woman she served.

The day following they left town for the country. It had turned suddenly very warm, and as the interurban carried them further away from the crowded city, the air grew fresher and cooler, and the whole party felt better already, as if granted a

new lease of life. The farmhouse was near the track so that it took only a short walk to reach it. It was large, comfortable, and unpretentious. The tenants lived in a cottage a half mile away on the Southern boundary. The house was simply furnished, but contained every convenience. In a few hours they were settled, and Virginia was as eager as the children to run about the place and discover new beauties. The news from home was reassuring. She had given her father Mrs. Armbruster's address, saying that she was staying with her and helping her so that she needed no more money and would return the check he had sent. Virginia was very thankful that her time was so fully occupied that she had little chance to dwell on the home situation or to give rein to homesick longings. Her days were brightened by messages on beautiful post-

cards from Elizabeth and Miss Marshall. She had not yet heard Miss Van Buren play, though she listened eagerly for the first note of a violin. The latter was a most cheerful, pleasant person, but very forgetful and constantly losing things. Thimbles were, if not the chief of her diet, the losing card in her game of life. She had just lost a gold one previous to Virginia's coming, a silver one followed then and six of aluminum. It was not that she was a great sewer so much as a great loser. She was always bursting in upon Virginia or her sister with: "Oh, have you seen my glasses or shoe polish, or stick pin?" as the case might be.

One day she couldn't find her new slippers. There was a general hunt up-stairs and down, to find them at last in a large and beautiful pitcher which stood on the mantel in her own room.

“Oh, yes,” she declared in a relieved voice; “I knew I had put them away. I was afraid if I put them in the closet that I’d never find them, my closet’s so big and full.” Her sister bought her a clothes bag and tacked it on her closet door, but Miss Van Buren forgot it was there. She said that it was so kind of Isabelle, but that new things were confusing to the mind after a certain age, and reform doubly hard.

Mrs. Armbruster was afflicted with severe headaches. Otherwise her health was improving. One day, when she was lying in her darkened room suffering untold misery with her head, the door opened softly and a low voice said: “Would you let me try something that used to relieve my mother?”

“Oh, anything,” murmured the tortured woman.

Virginia gently unbound the beautiful hair and began a gentle massage with her finger tips.

“The children are with Miss Van Buren,” she assured the patient. Some electric fluid or power seemed to rush to the ends of the girl’s fingers as she threw all the strength of her mind into the overmastering desire to cure or relieve. Gradually the eyelids fell, then the soft, measured breathing assured the healer that the sufferer was asleep. She stole softly from the room, relieved Miss Van Buren and started for the creek some distance away where the children were to enjoy wading. The latter ran on ahead, while Miss Van Buren walked a short distance with the girl.

“My sister has always been delicate and that has made her very nervous and apprehensive. The children ought really to

be free to run alone all over the place. They are too old to require your constant presence and attention, but I suppose we who are well and strong cannot understand Mrs. Armbruster's fears, nor her relief over your dependableness."

"She wouldn't have said that to a common nurse," thought Virginia gratefully. "I'm glad to know such nice people. They're real, for if a nursemaid doesn't know her employer's true self I don't know who does. I wish Christie might have lived here!"

She ran across the big field after the children singing: "I'm a poor Irish girl."

Mrs. Armbruster came down to dinner that evening, an almost unheard of thing on the day of her attacks.

"Virginia's fingers are magicians," she declared; "that child is a comfort." She



sighed. "If only I might keep her always!"

Wednesday was Mrs. Armbruster's "at home" day, and she adhered to it in the country. Several of her friends who were within one or two miles of her, and a few who were still in the city, came to call either on the car or in their machines.

Virginia always helped Miss Van Buren, and Mrs. Armbruster introduced her to the few present.

Three days later she received letters from two of them offering her higher wages than she now received if she would leave their friend to serve them.

Virginia thought at first that she would ignore both offers, but decided that such a course would be rude. She wrote briefly that she had promised Mrs. Armbruster to stay as long as possible, and that she was fully satisfied with her present situ-

ation. Virginia pondered over this one day as she helped the children string beads under the big tree nearest the house.

“I suppose they think that business,” she thought, “but it seems to me a queer idea of loyalty to a friend, especially one so ill as Mrs. Armbruster. I don’t believe Ma would do it, and I know my mother wouldn’t.” Suddenly she caught her breath and listened. From a little building at some distance from the house came the strains of a violin melody. She sprang to her feet and ran towards it. Throwing herself on the ground under the open window of the out-building, Virginia listened to such playing as she had never heard before. Miss Van Buren seemed to pour out her soul in the exquisite air. Like a human voice of rarest quality, the violin in the hands of a master sang its message into the listener’s heart. It throbbed and

roared, it sank to the lowest minor notes, and gradually rose again into a glad, triumphant song of praise and thanksgiving. Then there was quiet. Virginia waited expectantly, but there was no more.

When she rejoined her charges Ernestine exclaimed, "Why, Jinny, who's been making you cry?"

Virginia caught up Arline Susanne, Ernestine's newest doll, and decked her out in finery.

"Sometimes," she said, "the tears come from joy, and that's what Miss Van Buren's playing gives people."

But Ernestine was intent on Arline Susanne's new petticoat. That seemed much more interesting than Aunt Paula's playing.

The children played contentedly by the hour. Virginia had found Bob's and Janet's constant activity very wearing at

times, but she sometimes felt that she would welcome some pranks in her little charges. They were beautiful, amiable, and affectionate, but their natural docility was increased by their life of constant restraint and supervision.

The next morning when Virginia was dusting the upper hall vigorously, and trying to drive away a homesick longing at the same time, Miss Van Buren, dressed to go into town came hurriedly past her. As she flew down the stairs, she called back over her shoulder: "Will you dust my room? I left it a disgrace to the family!"

Virginia, glad to render any service to her adored Miss Van Buren, went at once to her room followed by her shadows, the little girls, who were helping with the cleaning.

There, right before Virginia's eyes lay

Miss Van Buren's violin and bow out of the case, on the table. The instrument seemed to wield a strange power over the girl. Resolutely she kept her eyes intent on her work, but they refused to obey her will. Never had she seen a violin like this! Its beautifully grained wood, polished and worn by age to a dark rich coloring, seemed a fitting abode for the soul hidden within. It seemed to call to her. Her fingers felt unable longer to hold the dust cloth. It had been so long since she had touched a violin! Hers was still in her trunk where it had lain neglected but not forgotten.

She would go on with her work. The violin belonged to another. She must not even look at it another time, she told herself sternly. And then she was beside it, and with hands that trembled she touched it caressingly. It seemed to fit itself under

her chin as if of its own volition. She seized the bow and played the "Air Varié," then the "Harp that once thro' Tara's Halls," then "Money Musk" and "The Wearing of the Green." The little girls watched her silent and astonished. Her back was towards the door. She was beyond sight and sound and in the Flahertys' little house with Dennis accompanying her.

Suddenly from the door came a voice: "Why, Virginia Hammond, how did you learn to play, and where did you get that touch?"

Virginia turning, saw Miss Van Buren. "I don't know how to play, but oh, I want to learn!" the girl said with a sob in her throat. "What must you think of me daring to touch your violin?"

"I wish you had done it before," cried Paula Van Buren, all the musician in her

to the fore. "Try that 'Air Varié' again."

Virginia obeyed her. Instead of being frightened she played it better than ever before. Miss Van Buren seemed to compel her best.

"How much time has been wasted! You must take lessons at once," Miss Van Buren declared.

"But I cannot afford it, and Father thinks my fiddling such a waste of time!"

"Who taught you?" Miss Van Buren demanded, ignoring the rest. And Virginia told her of the Flahertys, of her longing to take lessons, of her mother's desires, of her grandmother's gift. It seemed good to pour it all out to an understanding ear.

"Do you mean to tell me that Virginia Leighton was your grandmother? I never knew her, but I know all about



“ TRY THAT “ AIR VARIÉ ” AGAIN.’ ”





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her. Why, Virginia," Miss Van Buren was pulling off her gloves, "you must have a lesson this very minute. Come!"

"But your trip to town?"

"That for my trip to town!" cried the other, disdainfully, snapping her fingers. "It's a mercy I forgot my purse and lost my car. Now, take your violin and read this."

She thrust a music stand before her pupil, and on it placed some études. The lesson was on.

"Now," declared Miss Paula when it was over, "you must take two lessons a week."

"But I cannot pay you," stammered Virginia once more. Her eyes shone with excitement.

"I'm not worrying over any payment. A girl like you will not be long without money. Two or three years at most, and

you will be independent. I know what I'm about. If you have as much hard work in you as you have talent, your success is a foregone conclusion. I threw away my career because my mother had old-fashioned ideas about girls attempting anything outside the home. I'm not going to see another girl doing the same thing. I shall see your father and talk to him. It will be all right." Miss Van Buren waved her hand airily as if with the action she brushed aside all obstacles.

"I'm crazy to take lessons, but indeed, Miss Van Buren, I must think of Mrs. Armbruster. I can take time to practise in my free hours, but she must not be annoyed by the noise."

"Virginia, what a conscience is yours! God's out of doors is your studio in the daytime when it's fair, and my little den is yours in the evenings since I seldom

in summer use it. Any other dragon to stay?"

Virginia seized the beautiful artist's hands by way of answer.

"Oh, Miss Van Buren, do you realize what you're doing for me? Why, it's opening a door to Paradise!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### A STILL NEWER EXPERIENCE

**M**RS. ARMBRUSTER listened to her sister's enthusiasm in regard to her latest pupil with a gesture half-humorous, half-horrified.

"Exit my model maid; enter the musician," she exclaimed.

But Miss Van Buren would not consider the case from the joking standpoint.

"I'm not a betting character, Isabelle, but I shall wager my amethyst brooch which you admire, that if Virginia Hammond is spoiled by next June I shall hand it over to you. And I am equally sure that her lessons now will not interfere with her usual duties."

She was right. Virginia was, if anything, more careful than usual to be faithful to her tasks, but the progress she made in her music went beyond even her teacher's anticipations.

Virginia saw but little of the master of the house. He was engrossed in business and often stayed in the city over night. He was devoted to his wife when he saw her and was very liberal towards her and the children in the matter of money. The first of August he paid her for the month as usual.

"Your services, Virginia, have been so satisfactory that I want to increase your wages a dollar a week," he said, as he handed out the money.

It was so unexpected that Virginia could only stammer, "Thank you, sir."

She ran up-stairs to put her money away, and when she came down Mrs.

Armbruster had been reading her mail.

“What do you think, Paula?” she asked, as she looked up from a letter she was reading. “Inda Westwater is coming here this very evening!”

“Just as you’re getting better! It seems the irony of fate.” Miss Van Buren chanted mournfully:

“Of all sad words of a country home,  
The saddest are these: Inda will come!

I sha’n’t let her in. Politeness ceases to be a virtue in this case.”

“There’s no way out; we must put the north room in order, Virginia.”

The girl came from the room beyond where she was cleaning some brasses.

Miss Van Buren sprang up: “Virginia, we must prepare for the sacrifice. Come.”

“Paula!” Mrs. Armbruster’s voice was

reproachful, yet with a hint of laughter.

That evening when Mrs. Westwater arrived, Virginia little thought that her coming would interfere with her in any way, but the eyes of mortals are holden.

The second morning of the lady's arrival Virginia found Mrs. Armbruster making her guest's bed.

"Why, Mrs. Armbruster! I'm to do that every day Mrs. Westwater is here. I shall take care of her room entirely," she declared.

"Well, I believe you may; the children are so much more self-reliant since you came, and they are learning so many new things they're no care to speak of. Mr. Armbruster is delighted with the little songs you've taught Ernestine."

"Can't some one take me a drive?" came a voice from down-stairs.



Mr. Armbruster had lately bought a low phaeton and gentle horse for his wife's use.

"I will be there at once," Mrs. Armbruster answered.

In the days that followed the home life did not seem the same. The guest chose to sleep late in the morning.

"When I was abroad I acquired the habit, and I cannot break myself of it," she said. This meant that some one had to carry up her breakfast, and the some one meant Virginia. The cook grumbled.

The north room looked always as if a cyclone had struck it. Its occupant never thought of picking up her clothing, although she knew that there was but Virginia besides the cook in the way of helpers. She also knew — because Miss Van Buren told her — that her sister always

retired early, but she insisted that they play games requiring three people in the evenings, and would beg, "Oh, just one more, Isabelle; you know it is my only diversion in this Robinson Crusoe island!" when her hostess rose to leave.

She knew that Hester wakened easily, yet every night she chattered past the open nursery door after the children had gone to bed, calling down-stairs to some one in her high shrill voice.

She wanted to drive twice a day, but generally grew tired just when her companion wanted to go further into the beautiful country. She would follow Mrs. Armbruster into her room after lunch, although she knew that that was her hour for lying down, and would keep on talking until Miss Van Buren would appear on the scene and remind her. Then she would look so surprised and say with a

reproachful air: "My dear Isabelle! the morning is the time for sleep and rest; now I am as fresh as a daisy!" She was constantly suggesting things to be done for the children the opposite of what was their custom, and would often pursue them down to the brook where they loved to go with Virginia to wade.

"You should not allow them to do it," she would reiterate to Virginia; "it will ruin their feet."

"But their mother wishes it," Virginia would remind her.

"Well, poor Isabelle is so nervous she is not fit to have the oversight of them, and you should use your own judgment; though, to be sure, you are far too young and inexperienced to hold such a position of trust and responsibility."

She was constantly nagging the children until even the usually sweet-tem-

pered Ernestine was roused to rebellion.

“She makes me feel criss-cross all the time; isn’t it most time for her to go, Jinny?” she wailed.

Virginia coming into the kitchen one day for milk for Hester, found Marta, the cook, in a rage.

“That white trash up-stairs has been in here ordering me about as if I was her slave; she must have better coffee, and why didn’t I make toast oftener? And reelly she couldn’t understand why I didn’t wear white aprons in the kitchen; and she must say that she wondered that I didn’t have a bigger v’riety in desserts, but poor Mrs. Armbruster was so taken up with her aches and pains that she couldn’t look after things, and Miss Van Buren was only fit to fiddle!”

Virginia tried to soothe the troubled

waters. Marta had been very jealous of the new maid at first, because she seemed such a favorite with the "parlor folks," but Virginia finding her ill one day and helping her with the dinner after asking permission of Mrs. Armbruster, and offering two or three times to do part of her work in her precious evenings so that Marta could go to chat with the tenant's wife, she had grown not only to tolerate but to like her.

"You're tired," Virginia said; "here, I will give Hester her milk and come back to finish the dishes while you rest by the door. It is so close and hot to-day."

Later as Virginia came in from the garden with the children to dress them, she heard Mrs. Westwater's voice, excited and shrill: "I tell you, it's gone and I had it on my finger before I got up this morning. It's somewhere in this house. My poor,

dear husband gave it to me three years before he died, and it cost three hundred dollars."

Then Mrs. Armbruster's anxious but low, gentle voice: "It will certainly be found, Inda. We shall make a thorough search."

And search they did everywhere in vain for the emerald ring set in pearls which Mrs. Westwater constantly wore.

"Go over her room again carefully in the morning," Mrs. Armbruster counseled Virginia. "You are so clever at finding things."

Virginia was peering into every nook and crevice of the guest's room when Mrs. Westwater suddenly appeared. She came straight towards the young girl and took her by the arm.

"If you'll tell me where you have hidden it, I will pay you a dollar," she said.

Virginia drew away from her wide-eyed and incredulous.

“What do you mean? I know nothing of your ring!” she cried in angry amazement.

“Now, look here, my girl; you have pulled the wool over the eyes of the rest of this household, but you cannot do it with me. You’re the only one beside myself to enter this room. Where is that ring?”

Virginia pulled herself together; she would not reply, and above all she must not cry.

“What is the matter? Virginia looks as if she had fever!” Miss Van Buren’s voice came from the open door.

“I should think she would; I’ve been telling her that I know of her theft and asking her to get me my ring,” Mrs. Westwater replied angrily.

“Produce your proof; people who assert such things must bring proof,” Miss Van Buren’s cool voice declared.

“She is the only one besides myself who has been in this room!”

“Why, Virginia!” exclaimed Miss Van Buren suddenly; “don’t try to turn that heavy mattress by yourself. Wait till I help you.”

“I haven’t turned it since Monday,” Virginia said in a stifled voice.

The bed was a large old-fashioned mahogany with a heavy mattress. As the two turned it over, something fell on the floor at Miss Van Buren’s feet. It was the emerald ring! Miss Van Buren picked it up and handed it to Mrs. Westwater in silence.

“Well, I declare! I wonder how it ever got into that bed,” the lady marvelled. “Oh, I remember. I wanted to raise the



mattress a little at the head, and I stuffed a comfort under it. My ring is quite loose and must have come off when I tucked in the sheet again; it is a very tight fit, Paula, entirely too tight."

"I think you've forgotten something," Miss Van Buren's level voice reminded her.

The other looked blankly at her.

"I think you've forgotten to apologize to Virginia for your unjust accusation."

"Well, it looked that way; I'm sure it was quite natural to think as I did, but, of course, I wouldn't say a girl stole after I found my ring."

"That is no apology, Inda; a lady apologizes when she insults another lady."

"Don't make her say it, Miss Van Buren. It wouldn't cure the hurt in my heart," cried Virginia. "She thinks that

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I am the kind that does such things, so what could she say truthfully?"

She ran from the room, for she knew that in another minute she would burst into tears.

That evening Mr. Armbruster took their guest into the city to meet the northern train, and harmony reigned once more in the house of Armbruster.

"For why, mamma, do people with so many scolds have to come and stay so long at houses?" Hester asked after the visitor was gone.

But no one answered the child's conundrum.

September came and with it the news that Janet had been ill also with the fever.

"We didn't want to tell you until she was out of danger," her father wrote, "and now she is almost well, while Bob

is entirely so but has to be careful. Lucinda has been a perfect godsend, and Ma is resting at last. We think now that you will have to wait until Christmas to come home, a hard verdict for all of us. But we're thankful that the children are spared and try not to worry over expense and other things."

Virginia tried to bear the disappointment bravely and to think how much worse it might have been. Mrs. Armbruster insisted on her driving the children into the country often in the new phaeton, though no one knew, save herself, how much she suffered in her nervous state until their return.

She dreaded to think of the time, now so near, when Virginia must leave and return to Miss Marshall's and school. She knew it was selfish, but she would have liked to keep Virginia forever. She had

grown not only to depend upon her but to love her.

Virginia came to the town house with them. Ernestine was to enter Miss Kemble's school and Hester a kindergarten.

"I shall see Jinny every day," the former announced in triumph to her sister. "And I shall learn lots of big words."

"Well," Hester retorted; "I shall have more time to love her!"

The day came when Virginia could no longer postpone her going. The children clung to her in tears, and Virginia cried with them. Mrs. Armbruster took her hands in hers.

"These hands have done a great deal for me and mine, Jinny," she said. "What shall I do without them when my dreadful headaches come on?"

"Send for me," Virginia replied

promptly. "I am out of school early and I shall be glad to come."

"I'm not going to cry," Miss Van Buren declared. "Virginia is not going to get away from me; I shall scold her whenever I please at lessons."

Even Marta seemed sorry. "I suppose we have to go back to trash again; I wish they had my mother to keep 'em straight. They think they own the earth, let alone my kitchen!" she complained.

Virginia's trunk had preceded her, and in the bright sunshine, with long avenues of trees with their beautiful autumn tints before her, she walked away from her summer's experiences into those which awaited her in the new school year. What would they be? And would she fulfill Miss Van Buren's high hopes of her?

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HANDS OF THE DIAL MOVE

**V**IRGINIA found Miss Marshall at home earlier than usual to meet her.

They had much to talk over.

Miss Marshall had been greatly astonished over Virginia's letter telling her of her change of plans.

Bertha, too, had her story to tell. The family she served had gone away for two weeks, and she and her mother had visited a cousin in Michigan.

Elizabeth telephoned Saturday that she had only arrived the night before, but that she couldn't wait another day or hour to see her. Could Virginia come to lunch

and stay till Sunday night? Miss Marshall consenting, the girl was off. As no letters had passed between the friends — Elizabeth's cards having been forwarded by Mr. Hammond — the Jordans supposed that Virginia had left school the day following their own departure.

Great, therefore, was their amazement over the girl's account of her summer's experience.

The three were in the library after lunch when she told it; — the men were off for the day.

“Why, Virginia Hammond, I think it's wonderful; just like a girl in a book! I couldn't do such a thing to save my life!” Elizabeth exclaimed in her usual manner.

“Oh, yes, you could if the circumstances were the same. I felt that I must.”

“I'm afraid I'm like those dreadful Pharisees in the Bible,” Elizabeth de-

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clared, "for I'm thankful that I haven't your conscience. It must be so wearing. I wish that you could leave it at Miss Marshall's when you go home for the holidays. Just think what a rest you would have!"

"You sha'n't abuse my conscience that way; I feel quite friendly towards it, and one must be loyal to one's friends; I'm sure yours isn't a bit better," retorted Virginia laughing.

Sunday afternoon the girls went to the rectory to see the Olivers. The baby had learned many new words and was running about. They found out when the Girls' Friendly were to resume their dances. During the summer boat-rides and picnics had been substituted. Monday Virginia plunged into school work, which gave her enough to do with her music lessons. Mr. Hammond had given his consent to accepting Miss Van Buren's generous offer.



Miss Paula had written him that she had made a business proposition to his daughter to which she would not consent until he had professed his willingness that she should continue her lessons.

Virginia started the year with over fifty dollars in her purse. She wrote to Ma of her earnings, and told her not to send money for clothes or spending. She needed few of the former, — a new school dress, shoes, and fresh hair ribbons. She bought Lucinda a ready-made silk waist to wear with her black skirt for Christmas.

“I do feel so grateful to her I want her to have a present if no one else does,” Virginia declared.

“I am quite rich,” she thought; “and my board all summer, and a lovely time, too!”

Geraldine Hampton was eager to spread the news of Virginia’s “living out.” A

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few of the girls took her view of it, but most of them treated it with indifference. They knew and respected Virginia.

“She’s a dear, whatever she does,” said Mary McCabe.

Elizabeth was the center of a large group of girls on their homeward way when the subject came up.

“Pouf!” Elizabeth waved her hand airily. “Virginia’s mother was a Leighton; a Leighton can do anything!”

It made a great impression.

Some knew who the Leightons were, some did not, but Elizabeth’s words had a regal air, almost like “the king can do no wrong” in their English history lesson.

And Helen Harter said that East it was a fad for educated women to go out to service.

Virginia would only have laughed if she

had known it. She was growing in more ways than one.

Christmas she could not bear the children out of her sight. It had been a year since she had seen them. She found a great improvement in them. They had decided to give presents only to the children this year; but Alan sent a long letter and a dainty copy of Paul Dunbar's Poems, and Miss Marshall gave her a set of furs, and a beautiful brooch and gloves from Paris. Grace was East at college and did not come home for the holidays.

Virginia caught sight of Lucinda through the half open kitchen door furtively examining her new waist. "Jinny," she said later, "I'm afraid that waist is going to be a snare for my soul. It is so pretty and it's blue, and the first silk one I ever had; but most of all it makes me

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want to wear it to church Sunday in front of Arabella Trouter.”

The next Monday she confessed: “Well, I listened to the tempter’s voice, Jinny, and wore it; and I felt Arabella’s eyes goin’ right through my back during the sermon. I knew that I’d git paid back, an’ I did. I stepped in a hole comin’ home an’ twisted my foot an’ couldn’t sleep all night fer judgment.” Lucinda rubbed a minute, and then with a gleam in her grim eyes she added: “Arabella told Elmiry Travers that she thought folks as old as that Dildine woman ought to know enough not to wear nothing but black, an’ she did wonder where that waist come from, fer it wasn’t bought in the village. So I knowed she liked it and was worryin’ over it all right!”

Virginia played for the Flahertys. When she had exhausted her repertoire

Dennis, with a sigh of satisfaction, exclaimed:

“ Well, Jinny, I’ll live to see you one of these donner primers yet; ” while Norah added, “ An’ thin she’ll be marryin’ the Prisent an’ live in the White House.”

“ Well, when I do you must visit me. I’ll give you the best room in the house,” Virginia said.

“ I cud help wid the washin’; I wonder if they do be havin’ a good dryin’ place fer the clothes! ” quoth Mrs. Flaherty.

Virginia had intended going on to see Mrs. McPherson, but Dennis informed her that she had gone to see Grace unexpectedly. On her return home she found Ma in the early twilight before the open fire.

“ Where are the children? ” she asked.

“ Up-stairs in my room with their new paints.”

Virginia took off her wraps and drawing

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a chair close beside her, said abruptly: "I don't think you've had a very nice time since you came into our family, Ma, always nursing some one and working. Just wait till I come home next summer and I shall try and give you a nice rest. After that I must go to work. Miss Van Buren thinks that she can find me something to do in Carlisle."

"Fiddling?" asked Ma in wonder.

Virginia laughed. "If we knew how much Miss Van Buren earns we should open our eyes in wonder. She has all the pupils she will teach, and is often sent for to play in different cities. I shall owe her a great deal, and I want to begin repaying her as soon as possible, although she will never mention it."

"I wish I could help, Jinny, but sickness takes money and I must leave part of the small investments as a nest egg for future

emergencies. Two years ago I suggested to your father that he start big ginseng beds. Ginseng is so in demand, especially abroad. It takes time, but we hope that next summer it will begin to yield returns."

"Father is always working; he ought to make money. Ma," with a sudden change of subject, "I wish I had an un-failing recipe for bashfulness. I'm not as bad as I used to be — nearly — but after I went to the city it would come over me before strangers when I least expected it. I'm sure I don't want to have it."

"Well, my recipe is to think so much of others and fill your mind so full of interesting things that there won't be any place for you in it. After all, bashfulness is thinking of yourself. When I find it coming on I look all about real quick to see if I can't do something or talk to some-

body, or think of some of the lovely things this world's crowded with — my, Jinny, I'm preaching sure as you live, and it's time to get supper."

"Stay right here; I'm going to play maid. Your orders, ma'am?"

When Virginia returned to school she found a cooking class formed which met every Wednesday. Every spare moment she could snatch from her studies she spent in violin practice, anxious to make the most of such a teacher as Miss Van Buren. Her summer in the open stood her in good stead now. She was well and strong. She went now and then to the Armbrusters for lunch or dinner, to the Jordans and the rectory. Miss Marshall bought tickets for a course of fine concerts and recitals. She heard a few good operas, and the months whirled by as usual, winged.



One day in May Miss Kemble asked her to stay after school, as she wished to see her about something.

“It sounds mysterious, and may be worse than that, but I can’t think of anything on my conscience but the last few of those wretched problems!” thought Virginia as she awaited Miss Kemble in the back room.

The latter began at once on entering.

“I want to get up a little play for the first of June, Virginia, and I want your help.”

“Mine?” asked Virginia incredulously.

“Yes. The heroine must play the violin, and you are the one to do it. My nephew who is here visiting, and who is a playwright, has written a simple, and, I think, a very pretty play for my use. Miss Van Buren wants to introduce several other solos for you, besides those in the

play, as she wishes it to be a sort of *début* for her pupil as well as mine. I know that you are very busy, but I shall give you the libretto now and I think you will find it easily committed."

"I believe I could do the playing quite well, but I'm afraid you will be disappointed in my acting. I never acted in my life."

"I shall risk it. Of one thing I'm sure, Virginia, and that is that you will do your best. Elizabeth Jordan is to take part, and you can recite to each other."

"And my graduating essay is written and committed. How glad I am that I have that ready!"

Virginia was quite excited over the coming event. The play was very pretty, and she and Elizabeth had a great deal of fun over it. She was determined if possible not to disappoint her teachers.

“ Now is the chance to apply Ma’s recipe. If I can only forget myself and be interested in the play!”

Sundays Miss Marshall often invited Margaret Lindsay to dinner. Virginia liked her better the more she saw of her.

“ A capable, unusual girl,” commented Miss Marshall.

She was several years older than Virginia, but she proved an interesting companion. Virginia always felt that she was helped after being with her.

She had chosen for the subject of her paper her motto, “ I serve.” She felt quite nervous about delivering it, but once before the school and a few visitors, her fears left her and she did not forget a sentence.

But that was very little to the play. It meant a great deal to Virginia. It probably was the end of her school life, for she was not going to college. The days at

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Miss Kemble's had been wonderful ones to Virginia. They had opened a new world to her. They had roused her ambition. Miss Kemble herself was a woman of broad culture and extensive travel, as well as knowledge. She had the true teacher's gift not only of imparting what she knew, but of stirring the young people in her classes to higher things. She impressed upon them the value of thoroughness in their work, and that to shirk was to starve one's self.

"I cannot compel you to study or to live well each day; it all rests with you. I offer you the chance, your parents furnish the means, but you alone hold the motive power. You stay with me a few years and then leave. What you do after you leave will show how you have used these years. Some of you will end your school days, others will go on to college;

but your education must always go on. There are books and magazines and papers to be used as helps, but there is another education which is outside books. I mean the building of character, the doing of each day's tasks patiently and well, the controlling of yourselves, the power of strength to resist evil, the charity which thinketh no evil and refuses to judge. Tomorrow is the last day of school, and this is my last talk with you of the Senior Class. I always see my graduates leave with keenest regret. Our lives touch and then separate. You carry away my warmest wishes for your happiness and success, and by success I mean the fulfilling of your nearest duties, the carrying out to your best ability your highest ideals, whether your lives be humble or in high stations."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### “ I SERVE ”

**T**HE night of the first of June had really come, and the play had begun. It was called “ The Rose and the Thorns.” A young Italian cousin has come to America to live with her American relatives on the mother’s side. She finds after her arrival that she is snubbed and kept in the background by the newly rich vulgar family, intent only on show and position. They have sent for her only that she may be a servant, for they are unable to keep any maids long, with their constant demands and exactions.

Carita Melema, the Cinderella of the

household, has all kinds of experiences. She could, indeed, hardly endure her life were it not for her violin, the only keepsake of her former happy life previous to her parents' death. In the remote attic where she sleeps, she pours out her soul in music. The Irish cook is a character and furnishes the humor. The mother and three daughters are always making breaks. The father detests society in high life and prefers to spend most of his time among his cronies in the mines of the far West.

There is a famous Italian maestro who, with his wife, visits the city. They are the lions, and the Frobishers are determined to entertain them as house guests for a few days. They come, the cook is absurd, the daughters are loud, pretentious, and use poor English. The Bernardos are disgusted and seek a pretext to leave, when

one day the Signora, who prefers to stay at home when the rest attend a large function, hears suddenly Carita's playing. She is wildly enthusiastic, and can hardly wait to inform her husband of her discovery. She guesses at the girl's unhappiness. The maestro carries off the young violinist to fame and fortune in her native country, his wife is a second mother to her, and all ends in the only way stories should end, happily and well.

Elizabeth proved a capital Irish cook, and Mary McCabe was one of the sisters. But the interest centered in Virginia as Carita Malema, shabby, ragged and forlorn, yet lovely and touching in her gratitude for the smallest favor, her affection for the kind Irish cook, and her dignity under misfortune.

Virginia played Wagner's " Bridal Chorus," the " Angel's Serenade," Mendels-



sohn's "Spring Song," and Rubinstein's "Melody in F." But it was in a little creation of Miss Van Buren's, "A Girl's Thoughts," that she seemed to forget herself entirely and to throw into it her own interpretation, her own thoughts, her own life. She used Miss Van Buren's violin, and she made it voice her own experiences. Half way in the entertainment Virginia ventured to scan the audience in the two large rooms. She saw her father and Ma fearful of losing a word or a note — the children were at home under Lucinda's wing — the Armbrusters, Mr. and Mrs. Jordan and Theodore, Miss Marshall frowning a little in her anxiety for her success, and Bertha radiant and eager.

In the last scene, where she appeared in her pretty new lingerie gown to play — before appearing for the first time in public — for the maestro's final instruction, Vir-

ginia saw a young fellow in the audience who had eyes like Alan's, but, of course, it couldn't be. He hadn't expected to come East for another year, and, besides, Alan wasn't so erect and well groomed and good-looking. How foolish she was, and yet the very thought of her old boyfriend being here on this (to her) most important occasion made the hand that held the bow so firmly tremble for a moment. Back of the impossible Alan was a tall handsome woman, who seemed very intent and used her opera glasses constantly.

The "Spring Song" ended, but Virginia was enthusiastically applauded and there were cries of "Encore! encore!"

"What shall I do? I haven't anything else!" she said to Miss Van Buren in dismay.

"Play your Irish tunes," the latter sug-

gested; and Virginia played them with all her usual swing and life. Every one smiled, and the affair ended merrily.

Mr. Hammond and Ma hurried forward to see the chief character in the little drama, but many others were before them. Miss Kemble disapproved of flowers, but certainly Virginia was showered with compliments and generous congratulations. Ma, her heart glowing with pride, was glad to see how modestly the girl received it all.

“It paid for coming, Jinny,” said a familiar voice, and Jinny looked up to meet Alan Kingsbury’s laughing eyes. “I tell you, I’m proud to know you this day,” and her hands were shaken vigorously by the good-looking fellow Virginia had seen before. She introduced him to the Jordans and felt a throb of gratification as she thought: “He appears fully as

well as Theodore with all his advantages."

Mrs. Armbruster whispered: "You've made me lose a brooch to-day, Jinny," and Virginia puzzled over the strange statement.

Elizabeth caught hold of her and burst forth impulsively: "Oh, I'm so proud of you, Virginia; you never played so well, and your acting was 'way beyond the rest of us."

And then gradually groups of guests gathered about the small tables, which were brought in for refreshments; and Virginia led her father, Ma and Alan to one at the end of the room where they could talk undisturbed.

"Just think, Jinny, how I'll be saying some day: 'Once I played ball with the distinguished prima donna, Miss Hammond!'" Alan was saying.

“But I don’t understand how you came to be here!” Virginia exclaimed.

“You’d never guess,” said Alan. “Aunt Deb actually sent for me to make them a visit, and I’m to stay three whole weeks, if I don’t get fired; and as Mr. Black wanted me to see to a little business for him here, I arranged to attend to it the first of June, not a day later.”

They talked a great deal, for Alan was much more liberal of speech than pen.

Then Virginia turned to Ma: “I’m so happy I’m ready to shout; and this time I’m really going home to stay months.”

Her father tried to talk naturally, but David Hammond was in a sort of daze. His ideas on some points had received a decided shock. Directly after the performance an unmistakably German voice directly behind him was saying to his neighbor: “Ach, but Paula Van Buren

was right; the little girl has the gift! She will touch all hearts some day." And Theodore Jordan's boyish tones: "She plays all right!" and a tall fine looking man's distinct utterance: "That little girl is going to be heard from some day."

Mr. Hammond began to wonder if, after all, fiddling might amount to something; and he also wondered if Margaret knew, and he thought how proud and tender she would have been over their brave little Jinny!

As the four sat there, before leaving, a maid handed Virginia a card. "A lady told me to hand this to you," she said.

Virginia read the name on the card and turned pale. It was that of her Aunt Henrietta, Mrs. Kirkland. On the reverse side was written in a very small yet perfect handwriting the following: "Please come

to me at ten to-morrow morning at the Hotel Lafayette. I must see you."

"Are you sick, Jinny?" asked Ma anxiously.

Yes, she was sick. Her lovely evening was suddenly overcast with clouds. She didn't want to see her aunt. She must have been the tall woman back of Alan. The girl felt a sudden premonition of disaster.

Virginia slept late next morning, and came into the little room at Miss Marshall's to find Ma sitting comfortably by the window reading the account of Miss Kemble's commencement in the morning's paper. "Your father's gone out," she said; "I thought I'd wait for you."

"I have half a notion not to go," Virginia burst forth rebelliously — she had showed Ma the card the night before. "My aunt has ignored us all these years.

I don't know why she should notice us now."

" She's your own kin and your mother's sister. You can't get over that. I know it's hard to forgive what's done to those we love, but, after all, we have to forgive, Jinny."

Virginia remembered Miss Kemble's urgent: " The charity that thinketh no evil and must not judge," but she tried to throw it aside.

Ma went with her as far as her sister's establishment. Then Virginia, with a heavy heart, proceeded to the Hotel Lafayette alone.

As she followed the bell boy into the elevator and up to her aunt's suite she tried to feel very determined and superior, but in reality she was weak in her knees and longed desperately for the support of Ma's good strong hand. Her aunt came



forward to meet her. She was the cool, superior one. She looked taller than ever as she towered above her niece, in a handsome lavender kimono.

After her greeting she announced briefly: "I saw at once last evening that you were a real Leighton."

"I am told that I look like my mother."

"Sit down, my dear; I must say that I was amazed to see you at Miss Kemble's school, and to hear you play so creditably. I don't see how you've been able to have such advantages."

"It's my stepmother; she was determined that I should have everything except music; Miss Van Buren insists on giving me lessons and letting me pay for them later from my earnings," Virginia explained briefly.

"She must be paid at once," said her aunt, as if dismissing Miss Van Buren

from the scene. " I sent for you, my dear, to say that I wish to adopt you at once. My husband left me a great deal of money and I can give you every possible advantage. It will be a great change for you, but I can see that you are adaptable and have the manners of our family. When can you come? "

" Not at all, I'm afraid," said Virginia simply.

" What do you mean, Virginia? "

" I mean that I love my home and the children and Ma and Father so much I couldn't leave them to go with a stranger. You don't know how I've longed for them, — all last summer I had to stay away because of scarlet fever — and this summer I want to help Ma, my step-mother."

" I saw her last night," Mrs. Kirkland observed coolly.

“Yes, but you couldn’t see what she really is; nobody can at first. She is so good and knows so much, and loves us so!” Virginia said earnestly.

“Have you forgotten your own mother?”

“No, I love her more than ever,” Virginia’s voice trembled; “and that is another reason why I can’t do as you wish. Oh, Aunt Henrietta, I suppose I’m wicked and unforgiving, but every time I think of you I always see my mother’s sad face when you sent back her letters. She forgave you and her aunt, but I know how she suffered and how she longed for you before she died, and —” the girl could not go on.

“And I longed for her, and now it’s too late,” cried Mrs. Kirkland, covering her face with her hands. “You don’t know, child, what it means to suffer as I have —

your mother's was nothing to it because she was right and I was wrong!"

The woman shook from head to foot with repressed sobbing. Virginia looked at her wondering and frightened. It was so utterly unexpected.

" I didn't intend telling you," said her aunt at last, " but I've come home because in a few months I shall be blind. It is cataract in both eyes. An operation may cure me, but it isn't certain, and I don't see how I'm to bear it all. I've always said that I could stand anything except not being able to use my eyes. Virginia, I'm a most unhappy, lonely woman; I want my own flesh and blood kin, and you're all that I have. I know it's asking a great deal of you when you feel as you do, but I cannot give you up. Try to forgive me in time, and come and stay with me. It will help me as noth-

ing else will in the future that I so dread.”

But Virginia did not wait for her to finish. She was close beside her, her arms about her, protecting, shielding.

“I didn’t understand; I’m so sorry,” she cried. “I will come; I will try to help you. Dear Aunt Henrietta, don’t cry so. I shall read to you, and try to be eyes for you; oh, it may not be quite so dreadful as you think!”

“I’m sure it won’t be if you are with me,” said her aunt, putting her arm about the slender figure. “But I don’t mean to be selfish, Virginia. You must go home for a month. You must let me begin at once to do for you as if you were my own. I shall pay Miss Van Buren and place a thousand dollars to your account in the bank for present use. You may visit your home whenever you wish, only you

mustn't stay long at a time. It won't be as bad as you think perhaps. You must go on with your lessons, and you must have something else." Mrs. Kirkland rang.

"Clemence, bring me the black box in the lower dresser drawer," she commanded, as the French maid answered the summons. But Virginia exclaimed: "My father! how could I have forgotten him! He must decide for me."

Mrs. Kirkland smiled happily.

"I sent for him, and he was here before you this morning. He left everything to you. He has forgiven me."

"Father is so generous!"

The maid was back. Aunt Henrietta took the box from her. Virginia's heart beat faster as she saw that it was a violin case.

Her aunt held it out towards her.

"It is yours, Virginia. Your grand-

mother used it, and, I believe, her spirit dwells in it. I don't say it's a Stradivarius — if all were so that are said to be the country would hardly hold them — but it is a rare old Italian instrument."

Virginia's shaking hands were taking it from the case.

"Oh, the beauty!" she cried in delight. "I'm not worthy to have it!"

"We're none of us worthy of anything for that matter," declared Aunt Henrietta; "but," she added, in her new softened voice, as her glance rested on the earnest girl's face so like, so like her sister's, "I mean to try and behave myself now that I'm to have you to stay with me."

When the train carried Virginia home that evening, she had much to think about. Ma and Father sat across the aisle; Alan was to follow next day. They all thought she had done the right thing, though no

one knew the effort it cost Ma to say so, for she loved her new eldest daughter unspeakably and dreaded to lose her. Virginia's thoughts did not dwell so much on her relief from future money troubles and her chance of helping the children, her fulfillment of her heart's desire in regard to her violin playing, her changed life — these would come later; she did not linger on her disappointment regarding the long summer at home; all she could see was her aunt's beseeching eyes with their already clouded sight, her empty arms, her lonely figure as she bade her good-by.

"Poor Aunt Henrietta!" she thought. "She hasn't anything but money; and I was going to desert her — I, who wrote so easily of service, whose motto is 'I serve!' Oh, Jinny Hammond! I'm afraid your mother isn't very proud of you; but she's going to be. Aunt Hen-



rietta is going to have somebody serve her, and — yes, love her. A girl who has as much as I — with lovely things just showered on her so that she's all covered up with them — ought to do something for everybody. — Oh, how can I ever wait to see those blessed children!"

THE END.

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